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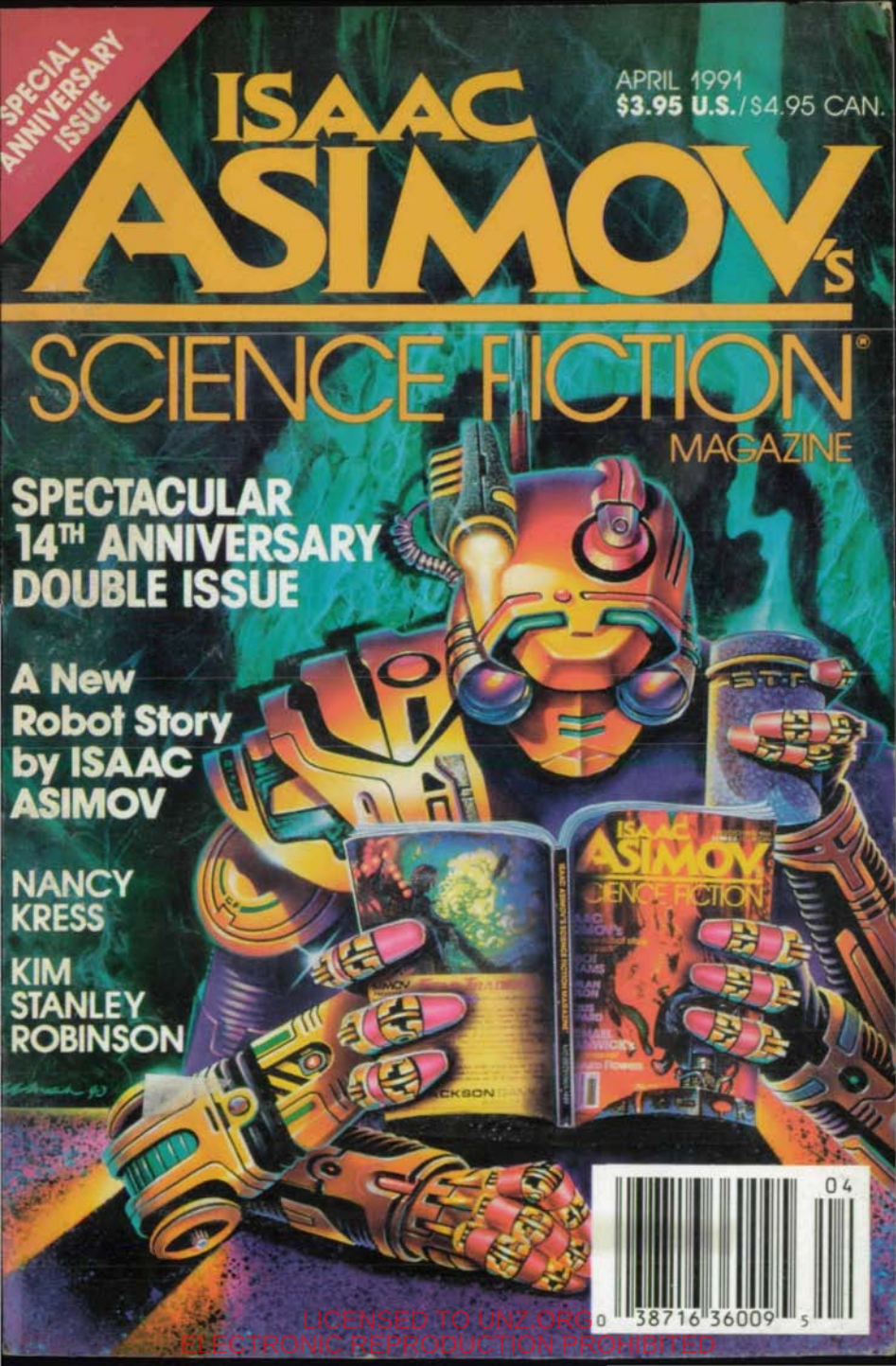
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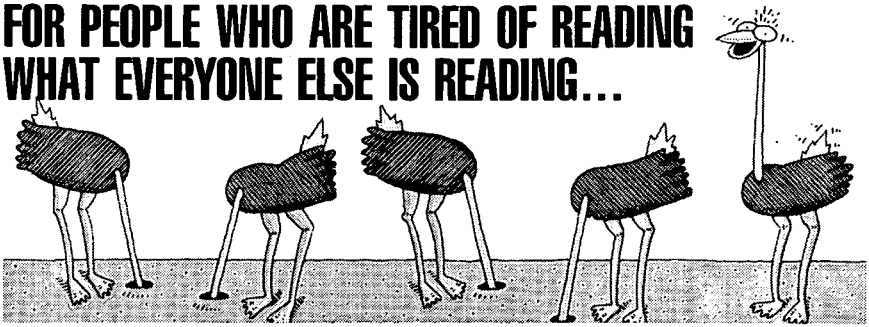
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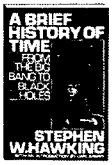


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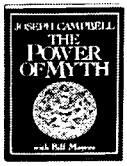
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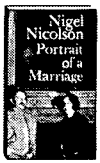
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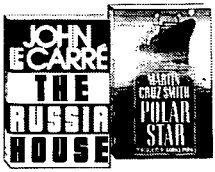
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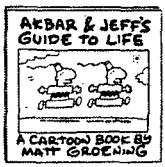
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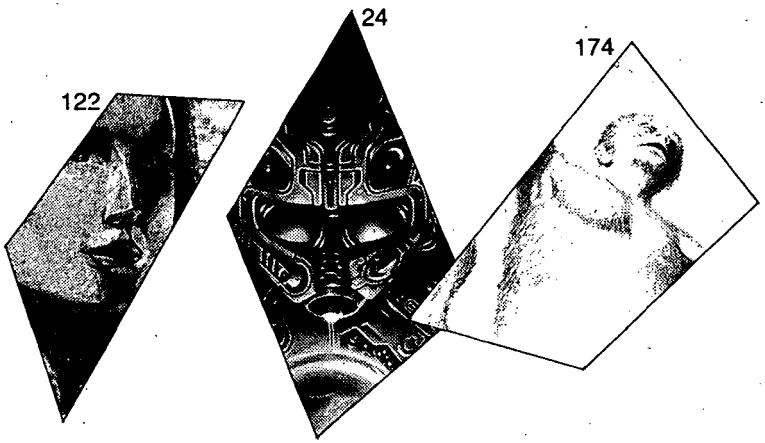
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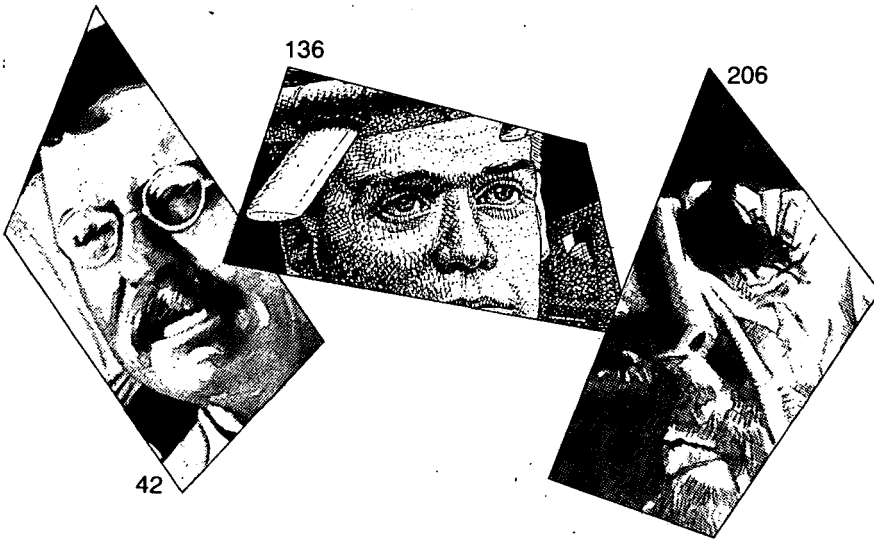
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EDITORIAL



by Isaac Asimov

SUSPENSE II

In the previous issue, I discussed the matter of suspense in a rather sweeping way, largely in the abstract. I would like to get down to the nitty-gritty a little bit more.

For instance, is there some way of representing suspense in a concise way—in a word or two?

We might guess that something indispensable to suspense is "danger." Our hero is in dreadful trouble and may be killed by the vile oyster-men of the planet Zplchk. How can he get out of it? Will he live? We bite our nails as the writer carefully stretches matters out, emphasizing the danger, giving us more details, making the situation worse.

And yet, you know for yourself that there is heart-breaking suspense at some times when there is no *physical* danger. Have you ever waited for the results of a test? Or an election?

No one is threatening to shoot you. If the test goes against you then, at worst, you fail. If the election goes against you, then, at worst, a man you don't want is elected. You may argue that failure will ruin your career or that the adverse election will ruin the town or the nation, and that this represents danger. Yes, but it is not immediate *physical* danger.

If you want to understand what suspense is, then, you have to look for something else. To me, what is required to represent it is this: "incomplete knowledge."

Suppose you are walking down a lonely, dark street at night and there is someone stalking you. If you don't hear any footsteps, if you have no knowledge of the stalker, you experience no suspense. On the other hand, if you hear the footsteps, but know who is behind you, and know he means you no harm, there is also no suspense. Both lack of knowledge or full knowledge remove all suspense.

If, however, you know someone is following you, but don't know who it is, or, if you do, you don't know what his intentions are, then there is suspense for the person involved or (if the matter is fictional) for the person reading about it.

Of course, this situation is one in which the incomplete knowledge leaves you uncertain as to whether you face physical danger or not, but it works just as well if no element of danger is involved.

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Let's consider mystery stories, where the element of suspense would seem to be the whole thing.

Traditionally, mysteries involve major crimes, particularly murder, and usually there is physical danger, for the murderer may (and usually does, in mystery stories) strike again. The suspense may be two-fold, then; 1) whodunit? and 2) can further victims be saved?

Contemporary mysteries tend to be drenched in violence so that the aura of physical danger is omnipresent. In fact, so much weight is put on violence that the relatively quiet question of the identity of the killer may be removed. The reader may know who the killer is, and the entire suspense rests on whether he can be stopped. Indeed, the modern mystery story has tended to lose its mystery and become a crime story, and increasingly a study of psychopathology. (This may be perhaps a reflection of the society in which we now live, but I'm not a sociologist and I will not venture an opinion.)

So, if we want to consider suspense in as pure a form as possible, let's go back to an earlier day when mystery stories were truly mysteries. Those were the decades ruled over by people such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. Such "old-fashioned" stories are now referred to as "cozy mysteries."

In a cozy mystery, there is a limited number of suspects, and all are people of the educated classes. The person who solves the mystery,

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whether a professional policeman or an amateur, must discover the identity of the murderer and must do it by evidence.

Mind you, the element of danger is not absent even so, for it is almost routine to have a second murder (and even more) when the detective's act of following clues grows dull.

This has presented me with a quandary. For many years I have had the strong urge to write mystery novels, but I also have a constitutional hatred of violence. The question arose, then: How far can I remove the element of violence, crime, and danger, and still have suspense?

I have written five mystery novels, two of them "straight" and three science fiction. They are *A Whiff of Death, Murder at the ABA, The Caves of Steel, The Naked Sun*, and *The Robots of Dawn*. In every one of them, there was exactly *one* murder. In four of the five the murder took place before the novel opened. In the fifth, it took place after the opening, but offstage.

And yet I managed to maintain the suspense by adhering to the doctrine of incomplete knowledge.

I went further. Back in 1972, I began to write a series of mystery short stories which I call the "Black Widower Stories." I have now written (and published, of course) sixty-five of them. Every one of those short stories is an "armchair detective" story.

In other words, a mystery is presented, and discussed, and finally solved by someone who never leaves the room, who, so to speak, merely sits in his armchair and listens. In only one or two of those stories is a murder involved, and no violence or danger is actually described on scene.

In fact, some of the stories deal with matters so trivial that one could scarcely imagine a story could be made out of it. In one of them, for instance (and very nearly my favorite one), my protagonist has lost his umbrella (I kid you not.)

He was visiting his girl friend. He had the umbrella when he walked into the apartment, he didn't have it when he walked out, and a thorough search of the apartment revealed no umbrella. In my "Black Widower Stories" I have six men sitting around a banquet table who try to solve the mystery—in this case, where the umbrella could possibly have gone.

They fail, and then Henry, the waiter, points out the logical place to look for it, and he turns out to be right.

It's an intellectual game, for ideally, the evidence and arguments used by Henry could have been used by the reader, too, and sometimes readers *do* anticipate the solution. (Sometimes, they even write to me of other and better solutions.)

How do I get away with a missing umbrella as the nub of a mystery story? Easy—incomplete information.

In such mystery stories, it is important that the reader be presented with some sort of puzzle.

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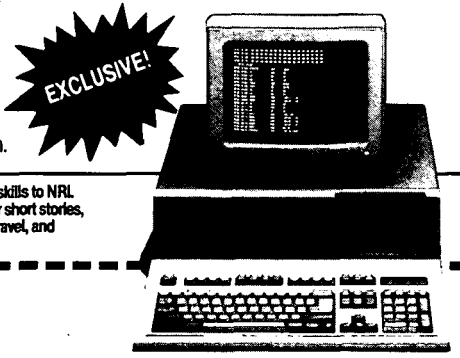
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The puzzle may be difficult to solve, or may even seem *impossible* to solve. (John Dickson Carr was the master of impossible crimes.) It seems difficult, however, or even impossible, only because certain key facts are kept from the reader. They are kept away not by omission, mind you, for that would be unfair, but by presenting them so casually and so surrounded by other material that the reader does not notice them. Faced with incomplete knowledge, the reader is anxious to find out what possible solution there can be and he keeps turning the pages in suspense even if only a missing umbrella is involved.

If you have a very clever detective—a Sherlock Holmes or a Hercule Poirot—how do you keep the mystery from being solved too quickly? Easy. You give the detective a dim-witted sidekick (Dr. Watson, Captain Hastings) and let the dimwit tell the story. *He* never penetrates the mystery, and he never tumbles to what the detective is thinking.

I use a simpler system. I have six members of the Black Widowers listen to the mystery presented by their guest. All are treated equally. We can hear each person speak, but we know only what they say. I never penetrate into their thoughts. In the course of the story, each one of them offers one or more possible solutions, all of which are unconvincing, and which serve only to make the mystery deeper.

My clever waiter, Henry, may see the solution early on. In fact, I am sure he does, but he is never allowed to play his role until everyone else has exhausted himself and the reader is convinced (I hope) that no conceivable explanation of the mystery is possible.

Then, and only then, does Henry come up with his solution and, what's more, he explains how he arrived at it, using material that is either common knowledge, or is hidden in the story itself. And (ideally) the reader then gives a big sigh of relief, sits back, and marvels at how clever I am.

I admit that my Black Widower stories do not have the readership gained by the great horror-story and spy-story writers who employ ton-lots of violence and grue to emphasize the suspense. On the other hand, my stories do have a reading clientele that is faithful, if relatively few in numbers. And, as for me, I have a writing niche in which I find myself warm and comfortable.

Perhaps that is the moral of this essay—that a writer should find his own niche, even if it does not represent the prevailing fashion. ●

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LETTERS

Dear Editor:

Please permit me to say a few words about Harlan Ellison's essay in the August 1990 issue. As I began reading the essay, I was disturbed by the acid tone of Mr. Ellison toward his fans. It was hard to believe that so much hatred could be directed toward one man. But as I continued, some things began to sound familiar, and as a teacher in a public high school, it soon became apparent to me that the people he was describing are the same ones who harass their teachers, commit costly acts of vandalism, pull the fire alarm, call in false bomb threats, blow up the toilets with cherry bombs, set fire to commode seats with their ever-handy cigarette lighters, etc, etc. After having spent sixteen years in the public school system, I have come to accept that these people will always be a part of our society. But what disturbs me most about Mr. Ellison's essay is that I had always assumed that these were the pranks of young people, of adolescents. Mr. Ellison's essay is proof that many of those same pranksters, who in fact are sometimes quite vicious as teenagers, do not grow out of it after all. I just assumed that they became mature, reasonable adults who at some point joined the mainstream of society, but the essay tells me that some of the same people in fact never learn, never change their behavior, and that is disturbing news indeed.

One other point I would like to make is that some of us commit the errors he spoke of (the T-shirt buying incident, for example) in total ignorance of the fact that someone's feelings are being hurt. How would a fan know whether the T-shirt seller is giving the pro a percentage of the profit? Should I make it a habit to ask the seller, and if so, would the seller tell me the truth? When I read the inscription on the T-shirt, "Fifty short years," I took it to mean that fifty years is not enough—we want more from Harlan Ellison. It did not dawn on me that Mr. Ellison is short in stature, since to me he is a giant in the field and I have never seen him in person.

Mrs. E.M. Hendrix
Ringgold, GA

There is no one in the world who has made more "short" jokes at Harlan's expense than I have (and with impunity). Of course, he made "fat" jokes about me till I lost weight, which annoyed him because he said it was unfair that I could grow thinner and he couldn't grow taller. However, although Harlan and I

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kid each other a lot (as do Lester del Rey and I, and Arthur C. Clarke and I) this is a form of male bonding. I must explain to anyone who has ever heard us kid each other that Harlan and I are, and always have been, the best of friends, and that we love each other. That goes for Lester and me, and Arthur and me, too.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov and Mr. Ellison:

I just finished reading Harlan Ellison's essay, "Xenogenesis." (I wonder how many more letters you will receive beginning this same way? Perhaps thousands.) The essay upset me deeply. No, I am not angry at what Mr. Ellison said. I was appalled at the despicable depths that a small percent of fans descended to. I've been painfully aware of that faction's existence in all aspects of fandom. I've only attended three out of state conventions in my life and, as a fan, will probably never go back because of what I've seen. Still, as I read "Xenogenesis," I felt much like the woman Mr. Ellison mentioned near the end of his essay: I wanted to cry.

The fanatics of the world frighten me. Some limit themselves to verbal abuse, which can be psychologically damaging in itself. Still others stoop lower. Defacing art? Physical attacks? No wonder so many artists refuse to come to conventions. They have a definite right to be afraid and angry. Ideally, fans should treat all artists with respect, even if we do not read or know of their work. We shouldn't have the attitude that these people *owe* us anything, simply because we are a patron of their art. Why *should* they care about our criticism? Yes, we are entitled to our opinions, but we do not have the right to throw them in these people's faces, or to harass and belittle them.

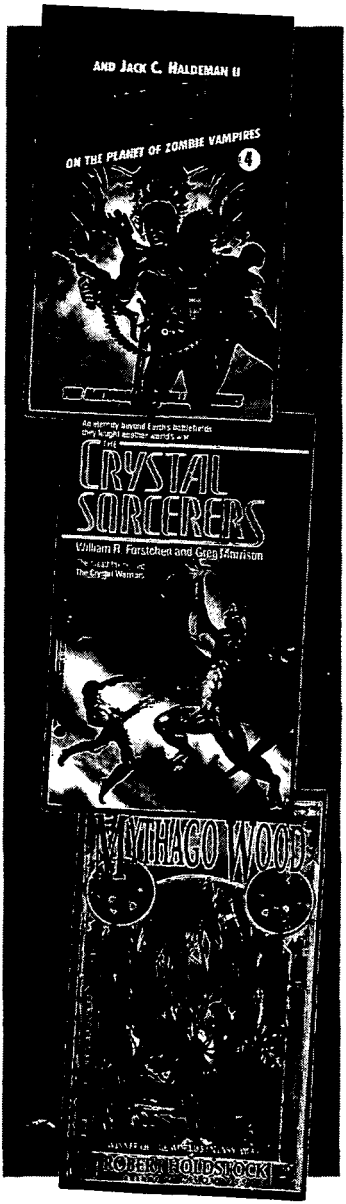
There is a dismal future in sight, one where people we admire have to seclude themselves behind electric fences, bodyguards, and unlisted phone numbers. We will never see them, have the opportunity to applaud their work or listen to them lecture. All this because the fanatics of the world have made it too hazardous for them to venture forth. Perhaps, worst of all, these people might stop writing altogether. Is there a solution? I doubt it. This kind of infection will always be there, festering, ruining the experience for the rest of us. But perhaps a handful might change their ways. Maybe. Maybe not.

Thank you, Mr. Ellison, for your honesty. But I don't think those who need to hear it most will have the sense to listen.

Kristy Merrill
Orem, UT

There are some people (I among them) who think that with the continued increase in world population, human life grows steadily cheaper. And those who do not go to the extremes of casually taking life (as among the street warriors of the drug society) nevertheless feel no qualms about destroying the quality of life for others. What to do about it? Reduce the population. Reduce the disparity between rich and poor, between privileged and

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underprivileged, and other things that represent that big, nasty old "L" that conservatives so gladly run against.

—Isaac Asimov

Folks:

Well, I *almost* resisted the urge to write this letter, knowing full well that Harlan Ellison's essay is going to prompt a bargeful of people to put pen to paper. But, I must add my two cents to the mix. Anyone who's ever attended a convention can relate to *something* in the article, as the rudeness of certain fans is felt by more than just authors and artists. In general, it's probably true that SF attracts a higher than average number of socially undeveloped types—not to mention a few out and out nut cases. But, by the same token, I truly believe that we are also blessed with more than our fair share of rare and wonderful personalities (not to mention talents). And the bottom line is that most of these unhappy incidents stem not from maliciousness, but rather from a lack of common sense. Hopefully Harlan's essay will encourage people to *think*. Take all rumors of an author's actions with a large salt lick, and for God's sake, if you see someone steal or damage something, stop them. Or find someone who will. If we make SF conventions a hostile environment for these pea-brains a lot less of them will continue to show up.

Ron M. Brinkmann
Naperville, IL

Amen.

—Isaac Asimov

Good Morning!

I just wanted to thank you for printing Harlan Ellison's essay "Xenogenesis." I have read it through twice, and I've been thinking about it for the past few days. I suppose you will get more angry mail than supportive, and I hope you don't get swamped!

I was, of course, shocked and dismayed at the treatment authors receive from fans—but not really surprised. Unfortunately, the famous have always been targets—just pick up any newspaper and read the celebrity gossip columns. And some people will claim that the famous set themselves up as targets. Those same people probably claim that a woman's asking to be raped because she's walking around at night, or wearing scanty clothes.

I guess I'm slightly surprised that fans of science fiction and fantasy feel that they are better, wiser, more intelligent, and more mature than the common public simply because of their shared interests. It strikes me to be a kind of a prejudice—not unlike those based on ethnic groups or the color of one's skin. Like any organization on this earth, we are made up of human beings—and we have just as many faults as anyone else.

While I'll agree that 95 percent of any group are polite and decent and well-meaning, we still have that 5 percent we have to watch out for. Actually, I think I've met some of them. For example, I went to college with a semi-literate fan who didn't believe in personal hygiene. (Unfortunately, this man developed a crush on me and followed me around like a little puppy dog.

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Yuch!!!) Then there was a fellow at a convention who thought it was cute to steal "Do Not Disturb" signs and wear them on his shirt. (Real cute. I just *love* to be woken up by a maid.) And, while I've been a fan for years, I've never really been into "fandom"!

I, too, wish these people would learn. They won't. Nobody thinks you mean them, and everybody will justify themselves if accused. (Has anybody else noticed that nobody makes a mistake these days? Half the time, it's the computer's fault. Sure, right. Darned convenient scapegoat.) The most the rest of us can do is watch out for the loonies and make sure we don't make unthinking mistakes ourselves.

In closing—and this letter is longer than I intended it to be—let me say that the Bible says that the poor will always be with us. In addition, I submit that we will always have the rude, the crude, the unthinking, the adult "adolescents," and the severely disturbed with us—and all the protection in the world won't matter. (Just ask any U.S. president.) I can only hope that the human race will mature someday.

I hope to be a published author someday. This essay made me change my mind—for all of ten seconds! And, while I'm at it, keep up the good work on the magazine!
Sincerely,

Lorraine Anderson

As I have frequently said in print, I do think that science fiction readers are better than other people. I suppose it is in a kind of way unjustified elitism, but when I think of the alternative to reading science fiction—reading pure junk (I don't want to offend anyone by identifying what I consider junk) or watching exploitation movies or empty-headed television game shows, or standing on the corner speaking in a vocabulary of six hundred words (including three hundred obscenities), I can't help but feel that SF readers are a group apart.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov & Gardner,

I want to thank you for printing Harlan Ellison's essay "Xenogenesis" in the August issue. Mr. Ellison did, as always, an excellent job in making his point. However, I feel that I must write in and express my agreement with him and my support of his vilification of these darker elements of fandom. Should any of the guilty parties write in and attempt to justify their unpardonable actions, I want there to be a dissenting opinion on hand. Remaining silent gives such low-lifes far more apparent power than they deserve.

I have met a few people like those described in the essay at the conventions I have attended, so I was saddened but not really surprised at the depths Mr. Ellison and his fellow authors reveal they can sink to. While even the best of us all may, on a bad day, commit some of the more minor bits of rudeness mentioned in "Xenogenesis," it would take a truly pathetic or sick mind to perpetrate the worst offenses. But, alas, there is a ready supply of them among the five billion humans on this world. Too bad some of them are

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attracted to "imaginative literature" (as Mr. Ellison calls it).

When the authors we like to read are assaulted in such manners by supposed "fans," it casts a pall over any true admirers and all too often results in a reduced output of the tales that earned the author our admiration to begin with. Indeed, it is for this reason that I have always resisted the temptation to write anything more than an occasional congratulations for a good story, if that. Given a choice between some attention from the author and leaving that author a little more time to write, I'll take the latter: a great new book by a beloved author is a better reward to me than any autograph or thank-you note, and gives that author the monetary compensation needed to continue writing that replies to fans do not. I think that's fair enough for everyone involved.

Thank you for a wonderful magazine. Keep up the good work and keep publishing quality essays along with your equally high-caliber fiction.

Douglas Lent
Wareham, MA

You represent the huge majority of readers and fans, but as I know, one bad experience outweighs a hundred good ones. How well I know, for instance, that one bad review of one of my books affects me more hurtfully than a hundred good reviews can heal.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov/Mr. Dozois:

Although I have been reading science fiction & fantasy for some twenty-eight years, this is but the second letter I have ever written in response to an article or story published.

As a member of those 95 percent who are thought to be sane and courteous to you and those who have given us words from which we spin our dreams and sometimes nightmares, I, too, am shocked and enraged that a small group of "fans" have acted and continue to act in such a fashion as to make it nigh impossible for us to meet and discuss the art with those who create the art.

As an attorney involved in "intellectual properties" such as copyrights and trademarks, I value highly the right of an individual to express his/her thoughts, even when those thoughts are perceived to be arrogant, contrived, or even immoral. Yet, that right does not and should not extend to allowing individuals to act in such a fashion as to not only cause emotional/mental or financial injury but even worse, to cause physical harm.

The victims of such acts have not been limited to the "creators." I attended my first con in Tulsa, Oklahoma relating to "Dr. Who." All in all, it was very enjoyable and everyone seemed to be acting as rational and compassionate human beings. Based upon that experience, I and my wife later attended another con elsewhere. Although the opportunity I and others had to discuss certain points of writing with C.J. Cherryh and Stephen Donaldson was quite memorable, there was, regrettably, a group of "fans" at that con whose conduct toward guests and other fans was along the lines of that outlined by

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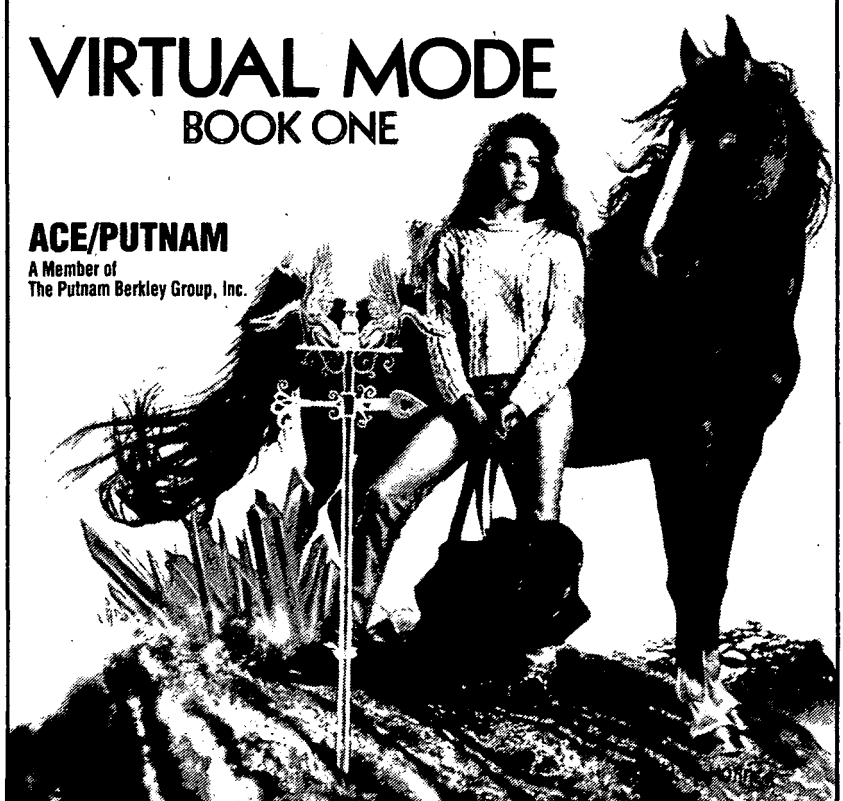
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Harlan, conduct which led me to decide that attending cons was no longer worth the time or money. Consequently, I spend my time reading and writing in the quiet of my home and when I need help, I turn to the various "writing" magazines and books for information.

I, too question why these individuals go to such extremes to abuse others, especially when the abusees receive such treatment not because of their having committed heinous crimes, but simply because of the ideas and thoughts they have put to paper or opinions they have expressed to the public. Yes, that's right, even Harlan has the right to call *Star Trek* trash and not be shot for it.

As I recall, one of the Good Doctor's stories dealt with a world where physical contact/proximity was unthinkable and that everyone dealt with each other by televideo communication devices. Regrettably, if such conduct by these "fans" continues to a point where our "parents" won't attend and the only means of communicating to a "parent" will be through a third party (similar to the jester who tasted the King's plate for poisons), then this world will truly be a far sadder place. Isn't there already enough pain and tribulation outside without adding to it?

On another far more pleasant note, my kudos to a magazine that has continued to improve with age. Sincerely yours,

Samuel A. Kitterman, Jr., Esq.
Las Vegas, NE

P.S.: I find it quite ironic that in the same issue that Harlan points out the non-existent "Paul Osborn" and his activities, Robert Silverberg writes about what a Mr. "Paul Osborn" had alleged against him concerning the authorship of "Vintage Season" in a letter published some issues back.

I think 95 percent is, if anything, an underestimate. The horror story I contributed to Harlan's essay involved a bookseller who took advantage of me, not a fan. In 51 years of writing and of being before the public at conventions and, for that matter, in the streets of New York (where I am frequently recognized) I have never been mistreated by a fan or, indeed, addressed in any but the friendliest of manners. It's only fair, I think, that I should say this.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Dozois, Dr. Asimov et al;

I've been subscribing to your magazine for quite a while and I haven't felt compelled to write until now. Now, being after having read Mr. Ellison's essay in the August 1990 issue.

I hope that it did Mr. Ellison good to get all of that off of his chest. Otherwise what he did to this reader—I will never use the word "fan" again—will have been a terrible waste.

I have been poisoned. Oh, not actually. I guess I won't die of it, not physically anyway. But a part of me is dying, or at least very ill. That is the part that has enjoyed reading science fiction for about thirty years. I'll still enjoy it but never quite the same way. Now, every time I pick up a piece of fiction I will be wondering if the author hates my guts and wishes I would drop dead.

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I have never made an attempt to contact any author for any reason but I am a *** and according to Mr. Ellison that makes me automatically dangerous.

You have, I expect, heard the expression, "If looks could kill." Well, if words could kill all of us out here in reader-land would be dropping like flies. This is the first time I have ever felt like apologizing for reading science fiction. What can I say? Excuse me all to pieces guys for reading and liking your stuff? I guess I'll just have to go on being offensive as long as you go on writing. I'll just take my latest issue of a great magazine and crawl back into the slimy pest-hole from which I came.

Linda C. Hern

Come, come, if I were to write an article dealing with the dangers of drug addiction among teenagers, I would not expect every teenager in the nation to feel that I was accusing him personally of being a hophead. Harlan was talking about a small minority, and I don't think anyone in his or her right mind would think you were a member of that minority and there is no reason why you should feel poisoned. Better that all decent fans (99.9 percent of them I imagine) should simply continue to display the decency they have always shown.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

This is the first letter I've ever written to a magazine and it was prompted by your August 1990 issue.

The thirty-five pages devoted to Harlan Ellison's diatribe is what managed to irritate me into writing to you. I consider myself an avid reader of science fiction. I am not a member of the fan cult and have never attended one of the many conventions you advertise in the back of your magazine. I am also not much of a gambler, but I would be willing to wager a fairly substantial amount that the majority of your subscribers are also "mere" readers and totally uninterested in the antics or crimes of the admitted five percent of fans that litter a writer's life.

Given the opportunity, I imagine store clerks, waitresses, police officers, and everyone else who deals with the public as a result of their occupation, could relate similar or even more horrific encounters. Mr. Ellison's essay did not engender the proper response in me. Rather than make me angry at the fans (which was its obvious intention), it made me angry with the magazine. As far as I am concerned, I have been cheated out of the pleasure of reading thirty-five pages of science fiction and your editors should have suggested to Mr. Ellison that his material would be more appropriately located in one of the fan magazines.

I subscribed to your magazine because it pretended to offer 192 pages of science fiction. Recently, the number of pages dedicated to fiction has dwindled and stories that really stretch the limits of the definition of science fiction have begun to creep in. Out of irritation, I took a hard look at this particular issue—only 111 pages of fiction. I realize that the twenty-five pages of advertisements are "necessary

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to keep production costs down," but they could be placed so that they don't interrupt the flow of a story (another pet peeve of mine that I throw in for free). If you are going to permit this trend to continue, please don't bother sending a renewal notice for my subscription.

Lamont Frederick
P.O. Box 211
Meadview, AZ. 86444

I dare say that there are people who want only science fiction in the magazine, or only this, or only that. However, as I have frequently said, we have to satisfy a wide spectrum of readership and there are many who are interested in matters about *science fiction, as well as science fiction itself. I don't think the space given to my editorials or to book review material, for instance, is wasted.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Gardner,

Having just finished reading Harlan Ellison's "Xenogenesis," I felt compelled to write in response. Having been a science fiction reader since finding Burroughs' Mars stories at age nine, I have been a long time "fan"of many authors. And it has long been an ambition to attend one of the conventions to see or meet at least some of those whose work has been so appreciated over the years. Unfortunately, my solo practice as a physician allows little spare time and to date I have been unable to do so.

The current medical malpractice situation has made many good, caring physicians give up on the practice of medicine. Not because they don't care about that 95 percent who are good human beings, but because of the 5 percent who are not and who demonstrate their psychotic, psychopathic, sociopathic, or sadistic personalities. It is both frustrating and disgusting to deal with these people. And the saddest part of the situation is the inability to predict which person will respond with such barbarism.

These atrocious behaviors are not just directed at the writers or guests at your conventions, but are directed at any person who makes themself publicly visible and vulnerable to attack. Our efforts should be to eradicate such behavior and not to withdraw into a shell out of paranoia. Such paranoia is almost as sick as the unreasonable attacks. Remember, there are ninety-five out of a hundred of us who really do appreciate each other.

As for myself, as a thirty year reader, I would still love to meet any or all of you and look forward to the time when you allow me do so.

Until then, please keep writing.

Betty J. Campbell, M.D.
Terre Haute, IN

Yes, there are rotten apples in every barrel and every person who deals with the public has horror stories to tell—as has every member of the public who has to deal with officials, bureaucrats, and people in authority. The point is that we in science fiction have always felt that science fiction readers and fans were a cut above the general public in intelligence, idealism and decency. It hurts that there should be rotten apples among them, too.

—Isaac Asimov

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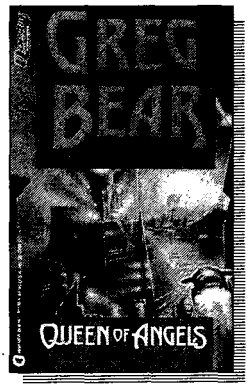
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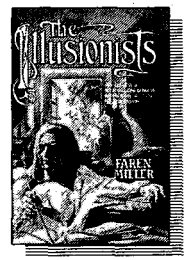
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Dear Mr. Ellison,

What a clever fellow you are. If I agree with you, I'm an apologist. If I disagree, I'm a sociopath . . . or at least a pain in the ass.

You seem to have gotten lots of mileage out of this topic over the years. (A vintage whine?) Most disturbing is the mean satisfaction you seem to derive in recalling the reactions of shattered fans as you gave your Guest of Honor speech. Plainly you wish to evoke a similar reaction in your readers.

That public figures in our society are often targets for the sick or misguided is a terrifying fact. That anyone victimizes anyone else is a sorrowful truth. Both my husband and I have been savaged by attackers at some time in our lives. The difference in our case is that we dealt with the attacks as adults, taking appropriate legal and personal security actions. Did it occur to you that the harassment you've faced over the years via the U.S. mail is a federal offense? Had you contacted the FBI they would have been happy to deal with those responsible. Did you prosecute the fans who stole from you? Did you go public with that information? It might have served as a deterrent to future crimes against you and other authors/celebrities. Grow up, sir. It's a scary old world, but it's the only one we've got.

I wish I could sympathize with your hurt at seeing fans in T-shirts which poke fun at your height. That's a tough one for me, since I am one of the fat fans you hold in such contempt solely on the basis of size. How dare you attempt to dehumanize me by using animal terms like gargantuan or behemoth to describe my appearance? If the view from your pedestal disturbs you, surrender the pedestal.

Finally, words for David Gerrold and Joanna Russ. Gerrold blames fans for his writer's block? Blame the sun for shining and see what good it does you. Joanna Russ is beating her head against the wall because one inarticulate fan can only sum up her respect for the author with the word creative? Give your poor head a rest, Ms. Russ. I could do with a few kindly meant words myself, and I'd have better sense than to complain about them.

This essay is a sad waste of your talent. Sad too is my need to respond, knowing that this and the other responses you're sure to receive will do nothing to alter your abiding disrespect for your fans, a disrespect you've shown twice: in using your position as Guest of Honor to uncork your wrath, and in your decision to reprise it for a wider (yes, WIDER) audience.

Debra Hulse Derr
Parsippany, NJ

The difference is this. Harlan may be nasty at times but he gives the world some examples of excellent writing that fill the hearts and minds of the readers. The people concerning whom Harlan complains have never given anything to the world. They are merely rotten apples who have not earned the right to be eccentric.

—Isaac Asimov

HARLAN REPLIES:

Ms. Derr in fact sent three *copies of this letter, apparently to insure all of us would notice her. Her*

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agenda is narrow, and obvious. She has a weight problem, it would seem; and in my recounting of an encounter with a bizarre woman who wanted me to autograph her naked breast, Ms. Derr has chosen to rewrite what I said, to validate her agenda. I have no animus toward fans or anyone else who may be overweight. It ain't healthy, but I've put on twenty pounds myself, and I know how hard it is to lose it. But the simple truth, if Ms. Derr cares to go back and read what I wrote not what she'd like to believe I wrote, she will see that I referred to the individual in question as "stout." Which she was. How about something in the neighborhood of 250 lbs.? In simple fact, I never even used the word fat once in the course of an 18,000 word essay. As for behemoth, the dictionary defines the word as applying to "any monstrous or grotesque creature." Which she was. Both. But far less by her appearance than her behavior. Ms. Derr seems so dissatisfied with herself that she paralogically extrapolates this passing reference in one of the most minor of the essay's anecdotes to perceive that I "dare . . . to dehumanize" her. That's some helluva leap of illogic. And though I feel the proper humanistic empathy for her sensitivities, I suggest that her ire is improperly, if self-centeredly, misdirected. How someone could ignore the totality of that essay, merely to misread stout, is—as Ms. Derr said herself—sad.

Since this will be my only opportunity for public rebuttal to a very few of the more than 200 letters received, let me add these two observations; as summation of the education I received in the wake of the piece. First, I was saddened that perhaps a dozen readers excused even the most awful extremes of behavior reported on the grounds that I should "grow up and face the fact that most of the population is rotten and ill-behaved." Or words to that effect. Talk about stating the obvious! But the point of the essay was that we who trade in often lofty dreams should be better. The-maybe-dozen who cynically shrugged and said It's the Way of the World, by their broken-spirited acceptance of bestial behavior, seem to me only to permit the continued existence of such awfulness. It's like saying we shouldn't revile, say, Nixon because he was only behaving the way many people behave; and that his only crime was in getting caught. I reject such devalued ethics, and so did the essay. And so did 95% of you who read it.

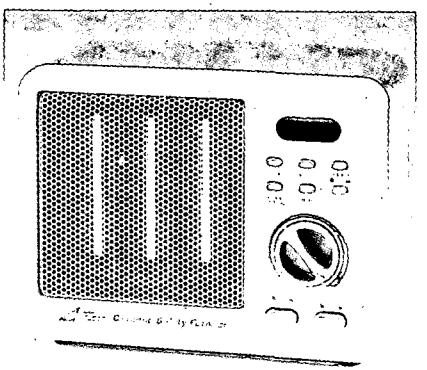
Second, one or two chose to interpret my position as being "Them" against "Us." Them being fans; Us being writers. Wrong! I know writers who are insensitive and rude, as do you. And I know far more kindhearted and polite fans than the slugs. No, if there was an Us/Them equation passim the essay, it was the 95% of us—fans and pros alike—who are decent and thoughtful, against the 5% of Them who need the services of both a psychiatrist and Miss Manners.



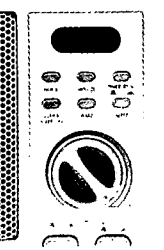
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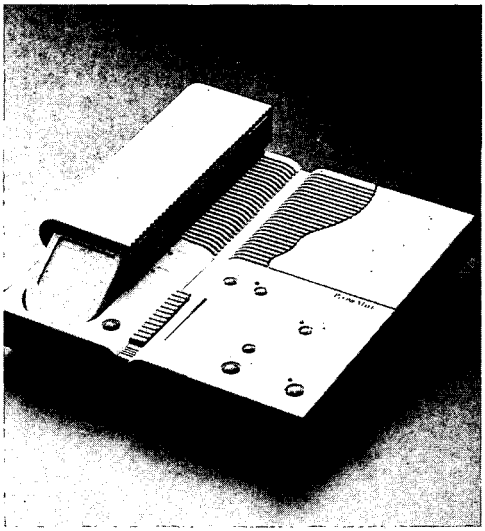
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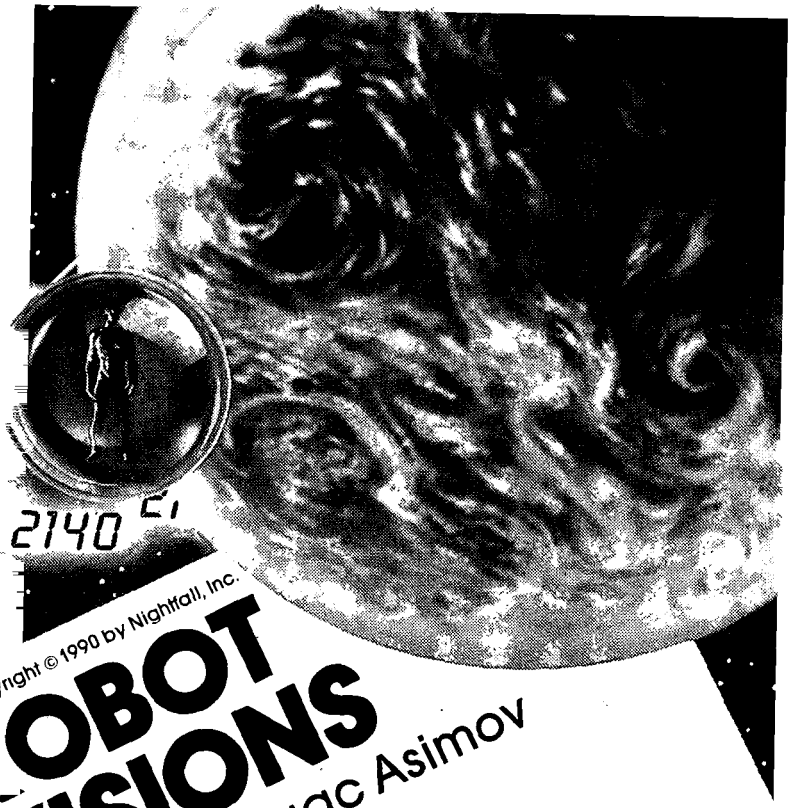
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OBOT VISIONS

by Isaac Asimov

What must we sacrifice to fulfill RG-32's vision of Earth's idyllic future . . . ?

art: Gary Freeman

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I suppose I should start by telling you who I am. I am a very junior member of the Temporal Group. The Temporalists (for those of you who have been too busy trying to survive in this harsh world of 2030 to pay much attention to the advance of technology) are the aristocrats of physics these days.

They deal with that most intractable of problems—that of moving through time at a speed different from the steady temporal progress of the universe. In short, they are trying to develop time-travel.

And what am I doing with these people, when I myself am not even a physicist, but merely an—? Well, merely a *merely*.

Despite my lack of qualifications, it was actually a remark I made some time before that inspired the Temporalists to work out the concept of VPIT ("virtual paths in time").

You see, one of the difficulties in traveling through time is that your base does not stay in one place relative to the Universe as a whole. The Earth is moving about the sun; the sun about the galactic center; the galaxy about the center of gravity of the local group—well, you get the idea. If you move one day into the future or the past—just one day—Earth has moved some 2.5 million kilometers in its orbit about the sun. And the sun has moved in its journey, carrying Earth with it, and so has everything else.

Therefore, you must move through space as well as through time, and it was my remark that led to a line of argument that showed that this was possible; that one could travel with the space-time motion of the Earth not in a literal, but in a "virtual" way that would enable a time-traveler to remain with his base on Earth wherever he went in time. It would be useless for me to try to explain that mathematically if you have not had Temporalist training. Just accept the matter.

It was also a remark of mine that led the Temporalists to develop a line of reasoning that showed that travel into the past was impossible. Key terms in the equations would have to rise beyond infinity when the temporal signs were changed.

It made sense. It was clear that a trip into the past would be sure to change events there at least slightly, and no matter how slight a change might be introduced into the past, it would alter the present; very likely drastically. Since the past should seem fixed, it makes sense that travel back in time is impossible.

The future, however, is not fixed, so that travel into the future and back again from it would be possible.

I was not particularly rewarded for my remarks. I imagine the Temporalist team assumed I had been fortunate in my speculations and it was they who were entirely the clever ones in picking up what I had said and carrying it through to useful conclusions. I did not resent that,

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considering the circumstances, but was merely very glad—delighted, in fact—since because of that (I think) they allowed me to continue to work with them and to be part of the project, even though I was merely a—well, merely.

Naturally, it took years to work out a practical device for time travel, even after the theory was established, but I don't intend to write a serious treatise on Temporality. It is my intention to write of only certain parts of the project, and to do so for only the future inhabitants of the planet, and not for our contemporaries.

Even after inanimate objects had been sent into the future—and then animals—we were not satisfied. All objects disappeared; all, it seemed, traveled into the future. When we sent them short distances into the future—five minutes or five days—they eventually appeared again, seemingly unharmed, unchanged, and, if alive to begin with, still alive and in good health.

But what was wanted was to send something far into the future and bring it back.

"We'd have to send it at least two hundred years into the future," said one Temporalist. "The important point is to see what the future is like and to have the vision reported back to us. We have to know whether humanity will survive and under what conditions, and two hundred years should be long enough to be sure. Frankly, I think the chances of survival are poor. Living conditions and the environment about us have deteriorated badly over the last century."

(There is no use in trying to describe which Temporalist said what. There were a couple of dozen of them altogether, and it makes no difference to the tale I am telling which one spoke at any one time, even if I were sure I could remember which one said what. Therefore, I shall simply say "said a Temporalist," or "one said," or "some of them said," or "another said" and I assure you it will all be sufficiently clear to you. Naturally, I shall specify my own statements and that of one other, but you will see that those exceptions are essential.)

Another Temporalist said, rather gloomily, "I don't think I want to know the future, if it means finding out that the human race is to be wiped out or that it will exist only as miserable remnants."

"Why not?" said another. "We can find out in shorter trips exactly what happened and then do our best to so act, out of our special knowledge, as to change the future in a preferred direction. The future, unlike the past, is not fixed."

But then the question arose as to who was to go. It was clear that the Temporalists each felt himself or herself to be just a bit too valuable to risk on a technique that might not yet be perfected despite the success of experiments on objects that were not alive; or, if alive, objects that

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lacked a brain of the incredible complexity that a human being owned. The brain might survive, but, perhaps, not quite all its complexity would.

I realized that of them all I was least valuable and might be considered the logical candidate. Indeed, I was on the point of raising my hand as a volunteer, but my facial expression must have given me away for one of the Temporalists said, rather impatiently. "Not you. Even you are too valuable." (Not very complimentary.) "The thing to do," he went on, "is to send RG-32."

That *did* make sense. RG-32 was a rather old-fashioned robot, eminently replaceable. He could observe and report—perhaps without quite the ingenuity and penetration of a human being—but well enough. He would be without fear, intent only on following his orders, and he could be expected to tell the truth.

Perfect!

I was rather surprised at myself for not seeing that from the start, and for foolishly considering volunteering myself. Perhaps, I thought, I had some sort of instinctive feeling that I ought to put myself into a position where I could serve the others. In any case, it was RG-32 that was the logical choice; indeed, the only one.

In some ways, it was not difficult to explain what we needed. Archie (it was customary to call a robot by some common perversion of his serial number) did not ask for reasons, or for guarantees of his safety. He would accept any order he was capable of understanding and following, with the same lack of emotionality that he would display if asked to raise his hand. He would have to, being a robot.

The details took time, however.

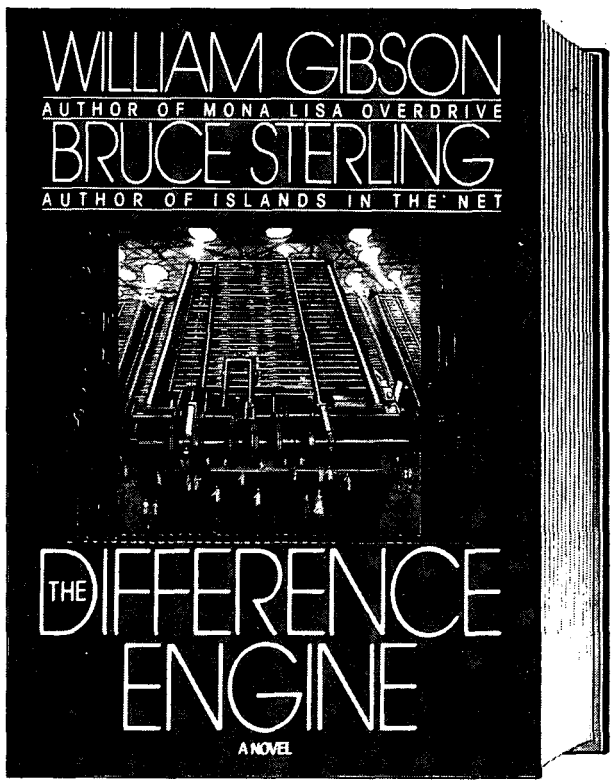
"Once you are in the future," one of the senior Temporalists said, "You may stay for as long as you feel you can make useful observations. When you are through, you will return to your machine and come back with it to the very minute that you left by adjusting the controls in a manner which we will explain to you. You will leave and to us it will seem that you will be back a split-second later, even though to yourself it may have seemed that you had spent a week in the future, or five years. Naturally, you will have to make sure the machine is stored in a safe place while you are gone, which should not be difficult since it is quite light. And you will have to remember where you stored the machine and how to get back to it."

What made the briefing even longer lay in the fact that one Temporalist after another would remember a new difficulty. Thus, one of them said suddenly, "How much do you think the language will have changed in two centuries?"

Naturally, there was no answer to that and a great debate grew as to

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whether there might be no chance of communication whatever, that Archie would neither understand nor make himself understood.

Finally, one Temporalist said, rather curtly, "See here, the English language has been becoming ever more nearly universal for several centuries and that is sure to continue for two more. Nor has it changed significantly in the last two hundred years, so why should it do so in the next two hundred? Even if it has, there are bound to be scholars who would be able to speak what they might call 'ancient English.' And even if there were not, Archie would still be able to make useful observations. Telling whether a functioning society exists does not necessarily require talk."

Other problems arose. What if he found himself facing hostility? What if the people of the future found and destroyed the machine, either out of malevolence or ignorance?

One Temporalist said, "It might be wise to design a Temporal engine so miniaturized that it could be carried in one's clothing. Under such conditions one could at any time leave a dangerous position very quickly."

"Even if it were possible at all," snapped another, "It would probably take so long to design so miniaturized a machine that we—or rather our successors—would reach a time two centuries hence without the necessity of using a machine at all. No, if an accident of some sort takes place, Archie simply won't return and we'll just have to try again."

This was said with Archie present, but that didn't matter, of course. Archie could contemplate being marooned in time, or even his own destruction, with equanimity, provided he were following orders. The Second Law of Robotics which makes it necessary for a robot to follow orders takes precedence over the Third which makes it necessary for him to protect his own existence.

In the end, of course, all had been said, and no one could any longer think of a warning, or an objection, or a possibility that had not been thoroughly aired.

Archie repeated all he had been told with robotic calmness and precision, and the next step was to teach him how to use the machine. And he learned that, too, with robotic calmness and precision.

You must understand that the general public did not know, at that time, that time-travel was being investigated. It was not an expensive project as long as it was a matter of working on theory, but experimental work had punished the budget and was bound to punish it still more. This was most uncomfortable for scientists engaged in an endeavor that seemed totally "blue-sky."

If there was a *large* failure, given the state of the public purse, there would be a loud outcry on the part of the people, and the project might be doomed. The Temporalists all agreed, without even the necessity of

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debate, that only success could be reported, and that until such a success was recorded, the public would have to learn very little, if anything at all. And so *this* experiment, the crucial one, was heart-stopping for everyone.

We gathered at an isolated spot of the semi-desert, an artfully protected area given over to Project Four. (Even the name was intended to give no real hint of the nature of the work, but it always struck me that most people thought of time as a kind of fourth dimension and that someone ought therefore to guess what we were doing. Yet no one ever did, to my knowledge.)

Then, at a certain moment, at which time there was a great deal of breath-holding, Archie, inside the machine, raised one hand to signify he was about to make his move. Half a breath later—if anyone had been breathing—the machine flickered.

It was a very rapid flicker. I wasn't sure that I had observed it. It seemed to me that I had merely assumed it *ought* to flicker, if it returned to nearly the instant at which it left—and I saw what I was convinced I ought to see. I meant to ask the others if they, too, had seen a flicker, but I always hesitated to address them unless they spoke to me first. They were *very* important people, and I was merely—but I've said that. Then, too, in the excitement of questioning Archie, I forgot the matter of the flicker. It wasn't at all important.

So brief an interval was there between leaving and returning that we might well have thought that he hadn't left at all, but there was no question of that. The machine had definitely deteriorated. It had simply *faded.*

Nor was Archie, on emerging from the machine, much better off. He was not the same Archie that had entered that machine. There was a shopworn look about him, a dullness to his finish, a slight unevenness to his surface where he might have undergone collisions, an odd manner in the way he looked about as though he were re-experiencing an almost forgotten scene. I doubt that there was a single person there who felt for one moment that Archie had not been absent, as far as his own sensation of time was concerned, for a long interval.

In fact, the first question he was asked was, "How long have you been away?"

Archie said, "Five years, sir. It was a time interval that had been mentioned in my instructions and I wished to do a thorough job."

"Come, that's a hopeful fact." said one Temporalist. "If the world were a mass of destruction, surely it would not have taken five years to gather that fact."

And yet not one of them dared say: Well, Archie, *was* the Earth a mass of destruction?

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They waited for him to speak, and for a while, he also waited, with robotic politeness, for them to ask. After a while, however, Archie's need to obey orders by reporting his observations overcame whatever there was in his positronic circuits that made it necessary for him to seem polite.

Archie said, "All was well on the Earth of the future. The social structure was intact and working well."

"Intact and working well?" said one Temporalist, acting as though he were shocked at so heretical a notion. "Everywhere?"

"The inhabitants of the world were most kind. They took me to every part of the globe. All was prosperous and peaceful."

The Temporalists looked at each other. It seemed easier for them to believe that Archie was wrong, or mistaken, than that the Earth was prosperous and peaceful. It had seemed to me always that, despite all optimistic statements to the contrary, it was taken almost as an article of faith that Earth was on the point of social, economic and, perhaps, even physical destruction.

They began to question him thoroughly. One shouted, "What about the forests? They're almost gone."

"There was a huge project," said Archie, "for the reforestation of the land, sir. Wilderness has been restored where possible. Genetic engineering has been used imaginatively to restore wildlife where related species existed in zoos or as pets. Pollution is a thing of the past. The world of 2230 is a world of natural peace and beauty."

"You are *sure* of all this?" asked a Temporalist.

"No spot on Earth was kept secret. I was shown all I asked to see."

Another Temporalist said, with sudden severity, "Archie, listen to me. It may be that you have seen a ruined Earth, but hesitate to tell us this for fear we will be driven to despair and suicide. In your eagerness to do us no harm, you may be lying to us. This must not happen, Archie. You *must* tell us the truth."

Archie said calmly. "I am telling the truth, sir. If I were lying, no matter what my motive for it might be, my positronic potentials would be in an abnormal state. That could be tested."

"He's right there," muttered a Temporalist.

He was tested on the spot. He was not allowed to say another word while this was done. I watched with interest while the potentiometers recorded their findings and while these were analyzed by computer. There was no question about it. Archie was perfectly normal. He could not be lying.

He was then questioned again. "What about the cities?"

"There are no cities of our kind, sir. Life is much more decentralized in 2230 than with us, in the sense that there are no large and concen-

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trated clumps of humanity. On the other hand, there is so intricate a communication network that humanity is all one loose clump, so to speak."

"And space? Has space exploration been renewed?"

Archie said, "The Moon is quite well developed, sir. It is an inhabited world. There are space settlements in orbit about the Earth and about Mars. There are settlements being carved out in the asteroid belt."

"You were told all this?" asked one Temporalist suspiciously.

"This is not a matter of hearsay, sir. I have been in space. I remained on the Moon for two months. I lived on a space settlement about Mars for a month, and visited both Phobos and Mars itself. There is some hesitation about colonizing Mars. There are opinions that it should be seeded with lower forms of life and left to itself without the intervention of the Earthpeople. I did not actually visit the asteroid belt."

One Temporalist said, "Why do you suppose they were so nice to you, Archie? So cooperative?"

"I received the impression, sir," said Archie, "that they had some notion I might be arriving. A distant rumor. A vague belief. They seemed to have been waiting for me."

"Did they *say* they had expected you to arrive? Did they say there were records that we had sent you forward in time?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ask them about it?"

"Yes, sir. It was impolite to do so but I had been ordered carefully to observe everything I could, so I had to ask them—but they refused to tell me."

Another Temporalist put in, "Were there many other things they refused to tell you?"

"A number, sir."

One Temporalist stroked his chin thoughtfully at this point and said, "Then there must be something wrong about all this. —What is the population of the Earth in 2230, Archie? Did they tell you that?"

"Yes, sir. I asked. There are just under a billion people on Earth in 2230. There are 150 million in space. The numbers on Earth are stable. Those in space are growing."

"Ah," said a Temporalist, "but there are nearly ten billion people on Earth now, with half of them in serious misery. How did these people of the future get rid of nearly nine billion?"

"I asked them that, sir. They said it was a sad time."

"A sad time?"

"Yes, sir."

"In what way?"

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"They did not say, sir. They simply said it was a sad time and would say no more."

One Temporalist who was of African origin said coldly, "What kind of people did you see in 2230?"

"What kind, sir?"

"Skin color? Shape of eyes?"

Archie said, "It was in 2230 as it is today, sir. There were different kinds; different shades of skin color, hair form, and so on. The average height seemed greater than it is today, though I did not study the statistics. The people seemed younger, stronger, healthier. In fact, I saw no undernourishment, no obesity, no illness—but there was a rich variety of appearances."

"No genocide, then?"

"No signs of it, sir," said Archie, then went on, "There were also no signs of crime or war or repression."

"Well," said one Temporalist, in a tone as though he were reconciling himself, with difficulty, to good news, "it seems like a happy ending."

"A happy ending, perhaps," said another, "but it's almost too good to accept. It's like a return of Eden. What was done, or will be done, to bring it about? I don't like that 'sad time.' "

"Of course," said a third, "there's no need for us to sit about and speculate. We can send Archie one hundred years into the future, fifty years into the future. We can find out, for what it's worth, just what happened; I mean, just what *will* happen."

"I don't think so, sir," said Archie. "They told me quite specifically and carefully that there are no records of anyone from the past having arrived earlier than their own time—the day I arrived. It was their opinion that if any further investigations were made of the time period between now and the time I arrived, that the future would be changed."

There was almost a sickening silence. Archie was sent away and cautioned to keep everything firmly in mind for further questioning. I half expected them to send me away, too, since I was the only person there without an advanced degree in Temporal Engineering, but they must have grown accustomed to me, and I, of course, didn't suggest on my own that I leave.

"The point is," said one Temporalist, "that it *is* a happy ending. Anything we do from this point on might spoil it. They were expecting Archie to arrive; they were expecting him to report; they didn't tell him anything they didn't want him to report; so we're still safe. Things will develop as they have been."

"It may even be," said another hopefully, "that the knowledge of Archie's arrival and the report they sent him back to make *helped* develop the happy ending."

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"Perhaps, but if we do anything else, we may spoil things. I prefer not to think about the sad time they speak of, but if we try something now, that sad time may still come and be even worse than it was—or will be—and the happy ending won't develop, either. I think we have no choice but to abandon temporal experiments and not talk about them, either. Announce failure."

"That would be unbearable."

"It's the only safe thing to do."

"Wait," said one. "They knew Archie was coming, so there must have been a report that the experiments were successful. We don't have to make failures of ourselves."

"I don't think so," said still another, "They heard rumors; they had a distant notion. It was that sort of thing, according to Archie. I presume there may be leaks, but surely not an outright announcement."

And that was how it was decided. For days, they thought, and occasionally discussed the matter, but with greater and greater trepidation. I could see the result coming with inexorable certainty. I contributed nothing to the discussion, of course—they scarcely seemed to know I was there—but there was no mistaking the gathering apprehension in their voices. Like those biologists in the very early days of genetic engineering who voted to limit and hedge in their experiments for fear that some new plague might be inadvertently loosed on unsuspecting humanity, the Temporalists decided, in terror, that the Future must not be tampered with or even searched.

It was enough, they said, that they now knew there would be a good and wholesome society, two centuries hence. They must not inquire further, they dared not interfere by the thickness of a fingernail, lest they ruin all. —And they retreated into theory only.

One Temporalist sounded the final retreat. He said, "Someday, humanity will grow wise enough, and develop ways of handling the future that are subtle enough, to risk observation and perhaps even manipulation along the course of time, but the moment for that has not yet come. It is still long in the future." And there had been a whisper of applause.

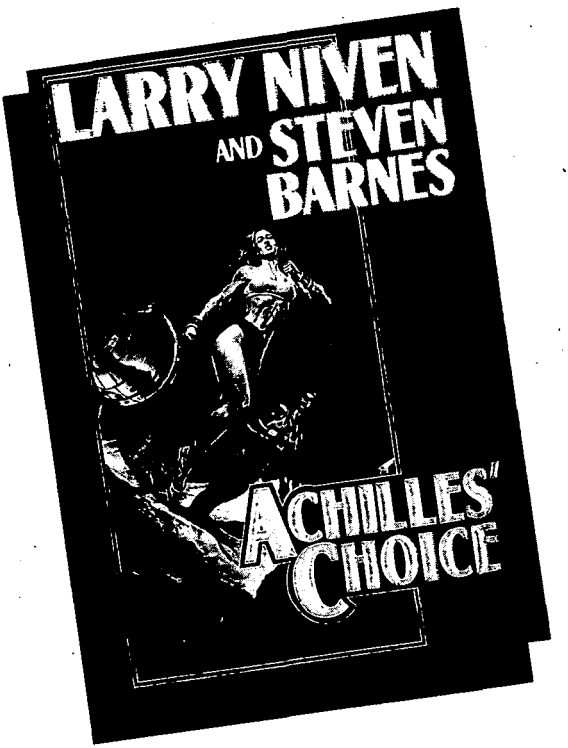
Who was I, less than any of those engaged in Project Four, that I should disagree and go my own way? Perhaps, it was the courage I gained in being so much less than they were—the valor of the insufficiently advanced. I had not had initiative beaten out of me by too much specialization or by too long a life of too deep thought.

At any rate, I spoke to Archie a few days later, when my own work assignments left me some free time. Archie knew nothing about training or about academic distinctions. To him, I was a man and a master, like any other man and master, and he spoke to me as such.

I said to him, "How did these people of the future regard the people

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of their past? Were they censorious? Did they blame them for their follies and stupidities?"

Archie said, "They did not say anything to make me feel this, sir. They were amused by the simplicity of my construction and by my existence, and it seemed to me they smiled at me and at the people who had constructed me, in a good-humored way. They themselves had no robots."

"No robots at all, Archie?"

"They said there was nothing comparable to myself, sir. They said they needed no metal caricatures of humanity."

"And you didn't see any?"

"None, sir. In all my time there, I saw not one."

I thought about that a while, then said, "What did they think of other aspects of our society?"

"I think they admired the past in many ways, sir. They showed me museums dedicated to what they called the 'period of unrestrained growth.' Whole cities had been turned into museums."

"You said there were no cities in the world of two centuries hence, Archie. No cities in our sense."

"It was not their cities that were museums, sir, but the relics of ours. All of Manhattan Island was a museum, carefully preserved and restored to the period of its peak greatness. I was taken through it with several guides for hours, because they wanted to ask me questions about authenticity. I could help them very little, for I have never been in Manhattan. They seemed proud of Manhattan. There were other preserved cities, too, as well as carefully preserved machinery of the past, libraries of printed books, displays of past fashions in clothing, furniture, and other minutiae of daily life, and so on. They said that the people of our time had not been wise but they had created a firm base for future advance."

"And did you see young people? Very young people, I mean. Infants."

"No, sir."

"Did they talk about any?"

"No, sir."

I said, "Very well, Archie. Now, listen to me . . . "

If there was one thing I understood better than the Temporalists, it was robots. Robots were simply black boxes to them, to be ordered about, and to be left to maintenance men—or discarded—if they went wrong. I, however, understood the positronic circuitry of robots quite well, and I could handle Archie in ways my colleagues would never suspect. —And I did.

I was quite sure the Temporalists would not question him again, out of their newfound dread of interfering with time, but if they did, he would

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not tell them those things I felt they ought not to know. And Archie himself would not know that there was anything he was not telling them.

I spent some time thinking about it, and I grew more and more certain in my mind as to what had happened in the course of the next two centuries.

You see, it was a mistake to send Archie. He was a primitive robot and to him people were people. He did not—could not—differentiate. It did not surprise him that human beings had grown so civilized and humane. His circuitry forced him, in any case, to view all human beings as civilized and humane; even as god-like, to use an old-fashioned phrase.

The Temporalists themselves, being human, were surprised and even a bit incredulous at the robot vision presented by Archie, one in which human beings had grown so noble and good. But, being human, the Temporalists wanted to believe what they heard and forced themselves to do so against their own common sense.

I, in my way, was more intelligent than the Temporalists, or perhaps merely more clear-eyed.

I asked myself, if population decreased from ten billion to one billion in the course of two centuries, why did it not decrease from ten billion to zero? There would be so little difference between the two alternatives.

Who were the billion who survived? They were stronger than the other nine billion, perhaps? More enduring? More resistant to privation? And they were also more sensible, more rational, and more virtuous than the nine billion who died, as was quite clear from Archie's picture of the world of two hundred years hence.

In short, then, were they human at all?

They smiled at Archie in mild derision and boasted that *they* had no robots; that they needed no metal caricatures of humanity.

What if they had organic duplicates of humanity instead? What if they had humaniform robots; robots so like human beings as to be indistinguishable from them, at least to the eyes and senses of a robot like Archie? What if the people of the future *were* humaniform robots, all of them, robots that had survived some overwhelming catastrophe that human beings had not.

There were no babies. Archie had seen none. To be sure, population was stable and long-lived on Earth, so there would be few babies, in any case. Those few would be taken care of, made much of, be well-guarded, and might not be distributed carelessly through society. But Archie had been on the Moon for two months and population there was growing—and he had still seen no babies.

Perhaps these people of the future were constructed rather than born.

And perhaps this was a good thing. If human beings had died out through their own rages, hatreds and stupidities, they had at least left

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behind a worthy successor; a kind of intelligent being that valued the past, preserved it, and moved on into the future, doing their best to fulfill the aspirations of humanity, in building a better, kinder world and in moving out into space-perhaps more efficiently than we "real" human beings would have.

How many intelligent beings in the universe had died out leaving no successor? Perhaps we were the first ever to leave such a legacy.

We had a right to feel proud.

Ought I to tell all this to the world? Or even to the Temporalists? I did not consider that for a moment.

For one thing, they were likely not to believe me. For another, if they *did* believe me, in their rage at the thought of being replaced by robots of any kind, would they not turn on them and destroy every robot in the world and refuse ever to build others? This would mean that Archie's vision of the future, and my own vision, would never come to pass. That, however, would not stop the conditions that were to destroy humanity. It would just prevent a replacement; stop another group of beings, made by humans and honoring humans, from carrying human aspirations and dreams through all the universe.

I did not want that to happen. I wanted to make sure Archie's vision, and my own improvement of it, would come to pass.

I am writing this, therefore, and I will see to it that it will be hidden, and kept safe, so that it will be opened only two hundred years from now, a little sooner than the time at which Archie will arrive. Let the humaniform robots know that they should treat him well and send him home safely, carrying with him only the information that would cause the Temporalists to decide to interfere with time no more, so that the future can develop in its own tragic/happy way.

And what makes me so sure I am right? —Because I am in a unique position to know that I am.

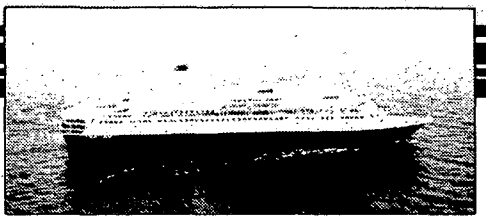
I have said several times that I am inferior to the Temporalists. At least I am inferior to them in their eyes, though this very inferiority makes me more clear-eyed in certain respects, as I have said before, and gives me a better understanding of robots, as I have also said before.

Because, you see, I, too, am a robot.

I am the first humaniform robot, and it is on me and on those of my kind that are yet to be constructed that the future of humanity depends. ●



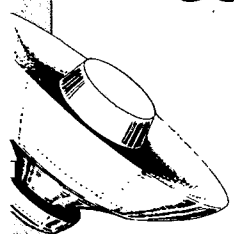
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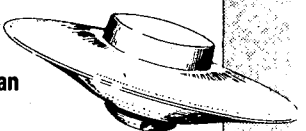


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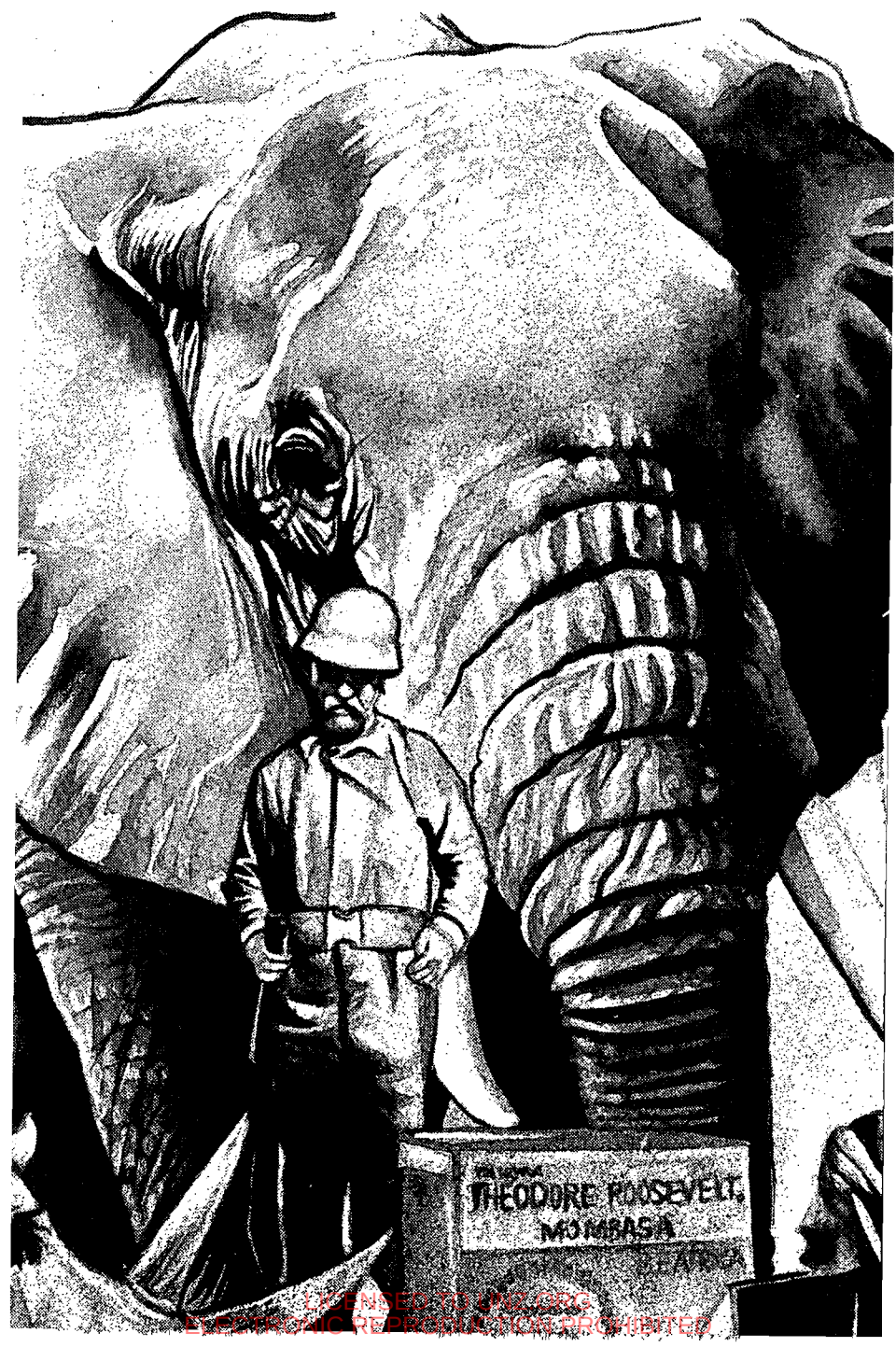
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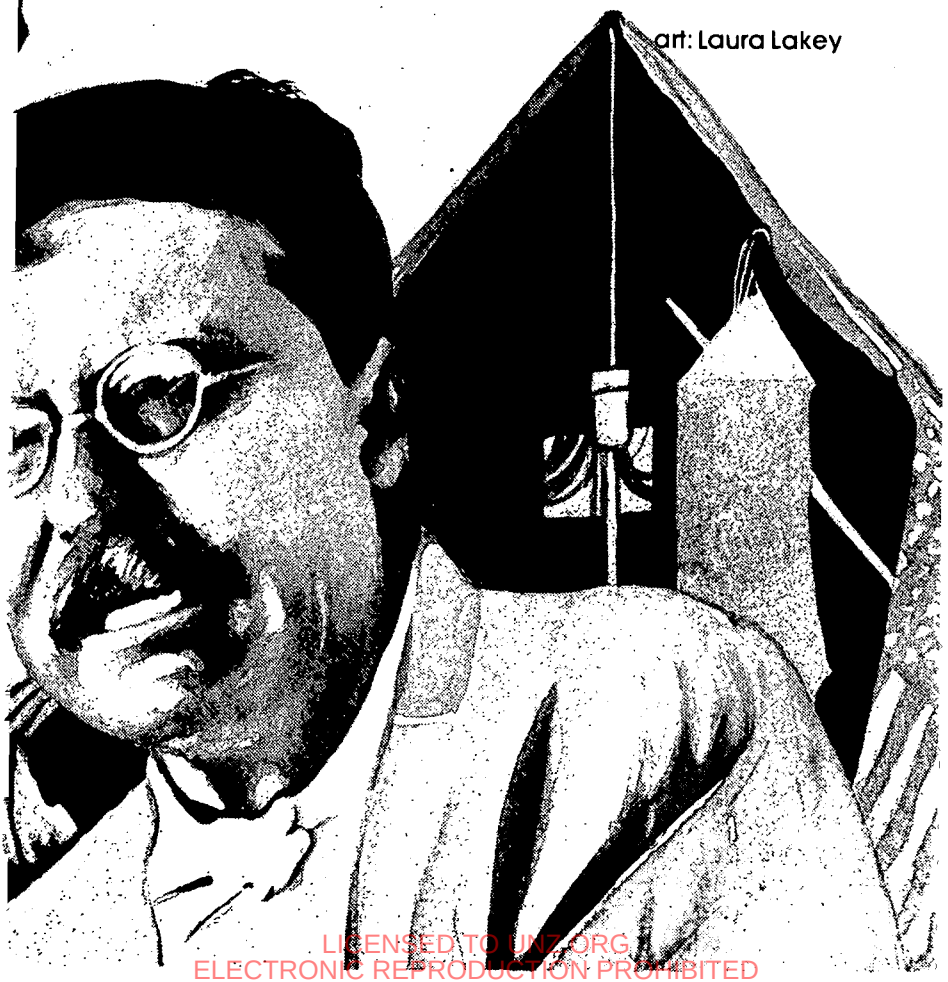
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BULLY!

by Mike Resnick

Hugo-award winning author Mike Resnick takes us along with Theodore Roosevelt on an extraordinary alternative-history safari into the Belgian Congo . . .

art: Laura Lakey



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I.

The date was January 8, 1910.

"At midnight we had stopped at the station of Koba, where we were warmly received by the district commissioner, and where we met half a dozen of the professional elephant hunters, who for the most part make their money, at hazard of their lives, by poaching ivory in the Congo. They are a hard-bit set, these elephant poachers; there are few careers more adventurous, or fraught with more peril, or which make heavier demands upon the daring, the endurance, and the physical hardihood of those who follow them. Elephant hunters face death at every turn, from fever, from the assaults of warlike native tribes, from their conflicts with their giant quarry; and the unending strain on their health and strength is tremendous."

—Theodore Roosevelt
AFRICAN GAME TRAILS

". . . . When we were all assembled in my tent and champagne had been served out to everyone except Roosevelt—who insisted on drinking non-intoxicants, though his son Kermit joined us—he raised his glass and gave the toast 'To the Elephant Poachers of the Lado Enclave.' As we drank with him one or two of us laughingly protested his bluntness, so he gravely amended his toast to 'The Gentleman Adventurers of Central Africa,' 'for,' he added, 'that is the title by which you would have been known in Queen Elizabeth's time.'

"A real man, with the true outdoor spirit, the ex-President's sympathy with and real envy of the life we were leading grew visibly as the evening advanced; and he finally left us with evident reluctance. I, for one, was shaken by the hand three times as he made for the door on three separate occasions; but each time, after hesitatingly listening to the beginning of some new adventure by one of the boys, he again sat down to hear another page from our every-day life. We even urged him to chuck all his political work and come out like the great white man he was, and join us. If he would do this, we promised to put a force under his command to organize the hunting and pioneering business of Central Africa, and perhaps make history. He was, I believe, deeply moved by this offer; and long afterward he told a friend that no honor ever paid him had impressed and tempted him like that which he received from the poachers of the Lado Enclave."

—John Boyes
COMPANY OF ADVENTURERS

Roosevelt walked to the door of the tent, then paused and turned back to face Boyes.

"A force, you say?" he asked thoughtfully, as a lion coughed and a pair of hyenas laughed maniacally in the distance.

"That's right, Mr. President," said Boyes, getting to his feet. "I can

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promise you at least fifty men like ourselves. They may not be much to look at, but they'll be men who aren't afraid to work or to fight, and each and every one of them will be loyal to you, sir."

"Father, it's getting late," called Kermit from outside the tent.

"You go along," said Roosevelt distractedly. "I'll join you in a few minutes." He turned back to Boyes. "Fifty men?"

"That's right, Mr. President."

"Fifty men to tame the whole of Central Africa?" mused Roosevelt.

Boyes nodded. "That's right. There's seven of us right here; we could have the rest assembled inside of two weeks."

"It's very tempting," admitted Roosevelt, trying to suppress a guilty smile. "It would be a chance to be both a boy and a president again."

"The Congo would make one hell of a private hunting preserve, sir," said Boyes.

The American was silent for a moment, and finally shook his massive head. "It couldn't be done," he said at last. "Not with fifty men."

"No," said Boyes. "I suppose not."

"There are no roads, no telephones, no telegraph lines." Roosevelt paused, staring at the flickering lanterns that illuminated the interior of the tent. "And the railway ends in Uganda."

"No access to the sea, either," agreed Boyes pleasantly, as the lion coughed again and a herd of hippos started bellowing in the nearby river.

"No," said Roosevelt with finality. "It simply couldn't be done—not with fifty men, not with five thousand."

Boyes grinned. "Not a chance in the world."

"A man would have to be mad to consider it," said Roosevelt.

"I suppose so, Mr. President," said Boyes.

Roosevelt nodded his head for emphasis. "Totally, absolutely mad."

"No question about it," said Boyes, still grinning at the burly American. "When do we start?"

"Tomorrow morning," said Roosevelt, his teeth flashing as he finally returned Boyes' grin. "By God, it'll be bully!"

II.

"Father?"

Roosevelt, sitting on a chair in front of his tent, continued staring through his binoculars.

"Kermit, you're standing in front of a lilac-breasted roller and a pair of crowned cranes."

Kermit didn't move, and finally Roosevelt put his binoculars down on a nearby table. He pulled a notebook out of his pocket and began scribbling furiously.

"Remarkable bird viewing here," he said as he added the roller and the cranes to his list. "That's thirty-four species I've seen today, and we haven't even had breakfast yet." He looked up at his son. "I love these

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chilly Ugandan nights and mornings. They remind me of the Yellowstone. I trust you slept well?"

"Yes, I did."

"Wonderful climate," said Roosevelt. "Just wonderful!"

"Father, I'd like to speak to you for a few moments, if I may."

Roosevelt carefully tucked the notebook back into his breast pocket. "Certainly," he replied. "What would you like to talk about?"

Kermit looked around, found another canvas chair, carried it over next to his father, and sat down on it.

"This entire enterprise seems ill-conceived, Father."

Roosevelt seemed amused. "That's your considered opinion, is it?"

"One man can't civilize a country half the size of the United States," continued Kermit. "Not even you."

"Kermit, when I was twelve years old, the best doctors in the world told me I'd always be underweight and sickly," said Roosevelt. "But when I was nineteen, I was the lightweight boxing champion of Harvard."

"I know, Father."

"Don't interrupt. People told me I couldn't write a proper sentence, but I've written twenty books, and four of them have been bestsellers. They told me that politics was no place for a young man, but when I was twenty-four I was Speaker of the House of the New York State Legislature. They told me that law and order had no place in the West, but I went out and single-handedly captured three armed killers in the Dakota Bad Lands during the Winter of the Blue Snow." Roosevelt paused. "Even my Rough Riders said we couldn't take San Juan Hill; I took it." He stared at his son. "So don't tell me what I can't do, Kermit."

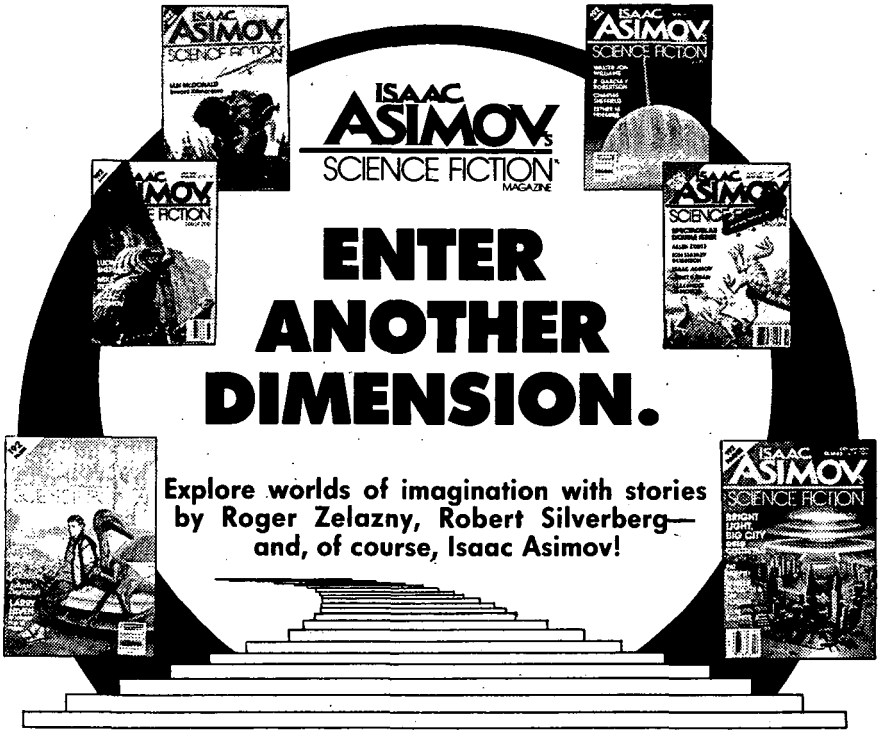
"But this isn't like anything else you've done," persisted Kermit.

"What better reason is there to do it?" said Roosevelt with a delighted grin.

"But—"

"Ex-presidents are supposed to sit around in their rocking chairs and only come out for parades. Well, I'm fifty-one years old, and I'm not ready to retire yet. Another opportunity like this may never come along." Roosevelt gazed off to the west, toward the Congo. "Think of it, Kermit! More than half a million square miles, filled with nothing but animals and savages and a few missionaries. The British and French and Portuguese and Belgians and Italians all have had their chance at this continent; Africa ought to have one country developed by someone who will bring them American know-how and American democracy and American values. We're a rustic, frontier race ourselves; who better to civilize yet another frontier?" He paused, envisioning a future that was as clear to him as the present. "And think of the natural resources! We'll turn it into a protectorate, and give it favored nation trading status. There's lumber here to build thirty million houses, and where we've cleared the forests away we'll create farms and cities. It will be America all over again—only this time there will be no slavery, no genocide practiced against an indigenous people, no slaughter of the buffalo. I'll use America

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not as a blueprint, but as a first draft, and I'll learn from our past mistakes."

"But it *isn't* another America, Father," said Kermit. "It's a harsh, savage country, filled with hundreds of tribes whose only experience with white men is slavery."

"Then they'll be happy to find a white man who is willing to redress the balance, won't they?" replied Roosevelt with a confident smile.

"What about the legalities involved?" persisted Kermit. "The Congo is a Belgian colony."

"They've had their chance, and they've muddled it badly." Roosevelt paused. "Suppose you let *me* worry about the Belgians."

Kermit seemed about to argue the point, then realized the fruitlessness of further debate. "All right," he said with a sigh.

"Was there anything else?"

"Yes," said Kermit. "What do you know about this man Boyes?"

"The man's a true pioneer," said Roosevelt admiringly. "He should have been an American."

Kermit shook his head. "The man's a scalawag."

"That's your conclusion after being wined and dined in his tent for a single evening?"

"No, Father. But while you were taking your morning walk and watching birds, I was talking to some of his companions about him. They thought they were bragging about him, and telling me stories that would impress me—but what I heard gave me a true picture of the man."

"For example?" asked Roosevelt.

"He's always in trouble—with the law, with the British army, with the Colonial Office." Kermit paused. "They've tried to deport him from East Africa twice. Did you know that?"

"Certainly I know it," answered Roosevelt. Suddenly he grinned and pointed to a small book that was on the table next to his binoculars. "I spent most of the night reading his memoirs. Remarkable man!"

"Then you know that the British government arrested him for . . ." Kermit searched for the word.

"Dacoity?"

Kermit nodded. "Yes."

"Do you know what it means?" asked his father.

"No," admitted Kermit.

"In this particular case, it means that he signed a treaty with the Kikuyu and got them to open their land to white settlement, and some higher-up in the Colonial government felt that Mr. Boyes was usurping his authority." Roosevelt chuckled. "So they sent a squad of six men into Kikuyuland to arrest him, and they found him surrounded by five thousand armed warriors. And since none of the arresting officers cared very much for the odds, Mr. Boyes volunteered to march all the way to Mombasa on his own recognizance." Roosevelt paused and grinned. "When he walked into court with his five thousand Kikuyu, the case was imme-

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diately thrown out." He laughed. "Now, that's a story that could have come out of our own Wild West."

"There were other stories, too, Father," said Kermit. "Less savory stories."

"Good," said Roosevelt. "Then he and I will have something to talk about on the way to the Congo."

"You know, of course, that he's the so-called White King of the Kikuyu."

"And I'm an honorary Indian chief. We have a lot in common."

"You have nothing in common," protested Kermit. "You *helped* our Indians. Boyes became king through deceit and treachery."

"He walked into a savage kingdom that had never permitted a white man to enter it before, and within two years he became the king of the entire Kikuyu nation. That's just the kind of man I need for the work at hand."

"But Father—"

"This is a harsh, savage land, Kermit, and I'm embarking on an enterprise that is neither for the timid nor the weak," said Roosevelt with finality. "He's the man I want."

"You're certain that you won't reconsider?"

Roosevelt shook his head. "The subject is closed."

Kermit stared at his father for a long moment, then sighed in defeat. "What shall I tell Mother?"

"Edith will understand," said Roosevelt. "She has always understood. Tell her I'll send for her as soon as I've got a proper place to house us all." Suddenly he grinned again. "Maybe we should send for your sister Alice immediately. If there's any native opposition, she can terrify them into submission, just the way she used to do with my cabinet."

"I'm being serious, Father."

"So am I, Kermit. America's never had an empire, and doesn't want one—but I made us a world power, and if I can increase our influence on a continent where we've yet to gain a foothold, then it's my duty to do so."

"And it'll be such fun," suggested Kermit knowingly.

Roosevelt flashed his son another grin. "It will be absolutely bully!"

Kermit stared at his father for a moment. "If I can't talk you out of this enterprise, I wish you'd let me stay here with you."

Roosevelt shook his head. "Someone has to make sure all the trophies we've taken get to the American Museum on schedule. Besides, if we both stay here, the press will be sure I died during the safari. You've got to go back and tell them about the work I'm doing here." Suddenly he frowned. "Oh, and you'll have to see my editor at Scribner's and tell him that I'll be a little late on the safari manuscript. I'll start working on it as soon as we set up a permanent camp." He paused again. "Oh, yes. Before you woke up this morning, I gave a number of letters to Mr. Cunninghame, who will accompany you for the remainder of the journey.

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I want you to mail them when you get back to the States. The sooner we get some engineers and heavy equipment over here, the better."

"Heavy equipment?"

"Certainly. We've got a lot of land to clear and a railway to build." A superb starling walked boldly up to the mess tent, looking for scraps, and Roosevelt instantly withdrew his notebook and began scribbling again.

"The Congo's in the middle of the continent," Kermit pointed out. "It will be very difficult to bring in heavy equipment from the coast."

"Nonsense," scoffed Roosevelt. "The British disassembled their steamships, transported them in pieces, and then reassembled them on Lake Victoria and Lake Nyasa. Are you suggesting that Americans, who could build the Panama Canal and crisscross an entire continent with railroads, can't find a way to transport bulldozers and tractors to the Congo?" He paused. "You just see to it that those letters are delivered. The rest will take care of itself."

Just then Boyes approached them. "Good morning, Mr. Boyes," said Roosevelt pleasantly. "Are we ready to leave?"

"We can break camp whenever you wish, Mr. President," said Boyes. "But one of our natives tells me there's a bull elephant carrying at least one hundred and thirty pounds a side not five miles from here."

"Really?" said Roosevelt, standing up excitedly. "Is he certain? I never saw ivory that large in Kenya."

"This particular boy's not wrong very often," answered Boyes. "He says this bull is surrounded by three or four *askaris*—young males—and that he's moving southeast. If we were to head off in *that* direction—" he pointed across the river to an expanse of dry, acacia-studded savannah "—we could probably catch up with him in a little less than three miles."

"Have we time?" asked Roosevelt, trying unsuccessfully to hide his eagerness.

Boyes smiled. "The Congo's been waiting for someone to civilize it for millions of years, Mr. President. I don't suppose another day will hurt."

Roosevelt turned to his son and shook his hand. "Have a safe trip, Kermit. If I bag this elephant, I'll have his tusks sent on after you."

"Good-bye, Father."

Roosevelt gave the young man a hug, and then went off to get his rifle.

"Don't worry, son," said Boyes, noting the young man's concern. "We'll take good care of your father. The next time you see him, he'll be the king of the Congo."

"President," Kermit corrected him.

"Whichever," said Boyes with a shrug.

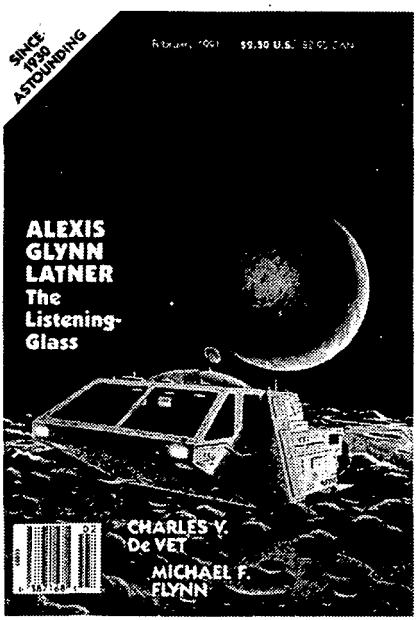
III.

It took Roosevelt six hours to catch up with his elephant, and the close stalk and kill took another hour. The rest of the day was spent removing

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the tusks and—at the ex-President's insistence—transporting almost three hundred pounds of elephant meat to the porters who had remained with Kermit.

It was too late to begin the trek to the Congo that day, but their little party was on the march shortly after sunrise the next morning. The savannah slowly changed to woodland, and finally, after six days, they came to the Mountains of the Moon.

"You're a remarkably fit man, Mr. President," remarked Boyes, as they made their first camp in a natural clearing by a small, clear stream at an altitude of about six thousand feet.

"A healthy mind and a healthy body go hand-in-hand, John," replied Roosevelt. "It doesn't pay to ignore either of them."

"Still," continued Boyes, "once we cross the mountains, I think we'll try to find some blooded horses to ride."

"Blooded?" repeated Roosevelt.

"Horses that have already been bitten by the tsetse fly and survived," answered Boyes. "Once they've recovered from the disease, they're immune to it. Such animals are worth their weight in gold out here."

"Where will we find them, and how much will they cost?"

"Oh, the Belgian soldiers will have some," answered Boyes easily. "And they'll cost us two or three bullets."

"I don't understand."

Boyes grinned. "We'll kill a couple of elephants and trade the ivory for the horses."

"You're a resourceful man, Mr. Boyes," said Roosevelt with an appreciative grin.

"Out here a white man's either resourceful or he's dead," answered Boyes.

"I can well imagine," replied Roosevelt. He stared admiringly at the profusion of birds and monkeys that occupied the canopied forest surrounding the clearing. "It's beautiful up here," he commented. "Pleasant days, brisk nights, fresh air, clear running water, game all around us. A man could spend his life right here."

"*Some* men could," said Boyes. "Not men like us."

"No," agreed Roosevelt with a sigh. "Not men like us."

"Still," continued Boyes, "there's no reason why we can't spend two or three days here. We'll be meeting our party on the other side of the mountains, but they probably won't arrive for another week to ten days. It will take time for word of our enterprise to circulate through the Lado."

"Good!" said Roosvelt. "It'll give me time to catch up on my writing." He paused. "By the way, where did you plan to pitch my tent?"

"Wherever you'd like it."

"As close to the stream as possible," answered Roosevelt. "It's really quite a lovely sight to wake up to."

"No reason why not," said Boyes. "I haven't seen any crocs or hippos about." He gave a brief command to the natives, and pointed to the spot Roosevelt had indicated.

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"Please make sure the American flag is stationed in front of it," said Roosevelt. "Oh, and have my books placed inside it."

"You know," said Boyes, "we're using two boys just to carry your books, Mr. President. Perhaps we could leave some of them behind when we break camp and push inland."

Roosevelt shook his head. "That's out of the question: I'd be quite lost without access to literature. If we're short of manpower, we'll leave my rifle behind and have my gunbearer carry one of the book boxes."

Boyes smiled. "That won't be necessary, Mr. President. It was just a suggestion."

"Good," said Roosevelt with a smile. "Just between you and me, I'd feel almost as lost without my Winchester."

"You handle it very well."

"I'm just a talented amateur," answered Roosevelt. "I'm not in a class with you professional hunters."

Boyes laughed. "I'm no professional."

"You were hunting for ivory when we met."

"I was trying to increase my bank account," answered Boyes. "The ivory was just a means to an end. Karamojo Bell is a real hunter, or your friend Selous. I'm just an entrepreneur."

"Don't be so modest, John," said Roosevelt. "You managed to amass quite a pile of ivory. You couldn't do that if you weren't an expert hunter."

"Would you like to know how I actually went about collecting that ivory?" asked Boyes with a grin.

"Certainly."

"I don't know the first thing about tracking game, so I stopped at a British border post, explained that I was terrified of elephants, and slipped the border guards a few pounds to mark the major concentrations on a map of the Lado Enclave so I could avoid them."

Roosevelt laughed heartily. "Still, once you found the herds, you obviously knew what to do."

Boyes shrugged. "I just went where there was no competition."

"I thought the Enclave was filled with ivory hunters."

"Not in the shoulder-high grass," answered Boyes. "No way to sight your rifle, or to maneuver in case of a charge."

"How did you manage to hunt under such conditions?"

"I stood on my bearer's shoulders." Boyes chuckled at the memory. "The first few times I used a .475, but the recoil was so powerful that it knocked me off my perch each time I fired it, so in the end I wound up using a Lee-Enfield .303."

"You're a man of many talents, John."

A yellow-vented bulbul, bolder than its companions, suddenly landed in the clearing to more closely observe the pitching of the tents.

"Lovely bird, the bulbul," remarked Roosevelt, pulling out his notebook and entering the time and location where he had spotted it. "It has an absolutely beautiful voice, too."

"You're quite a bird-watcher, Mr. President," noted Boyes.

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"Ornithology was my first love," answered Roosevelt. "I published my initial monograph on it when I was fourteen." He paused. "For the longest time, I thought my future would be in ornithology and taxidermy, but eventually I found men more interesting than animals." Suddenly he grinned. "Or at least, more in need of leadership."

"Well, we've come to the right place," replied Boyes. "I think the Congo is probably more in need of leadership than most places."

"That's what we're here for," agreed Roosevelt. "In fact, I think the time has come to begin formulating an approach to the problem. So far we've just been speaking in generalizations; we must have some definite plan to present to the men when we're fully assembled." He paused. "Let's take another look at that map."

Boyes withdrew a map from his pocket and unfolded it.

"This will never do," said Roosevelt, trying to study the map as the wind kept whipping through it. "Let's find a table."

Boyes ordered two of the natives to set up a table and a pair of chairs, and a moment later he and Roosevelt were sitting side by side, with the map laid out on the table and held in place by four small rocks.

"Where are we now?" asked Roosevelt.

"Right about here, sir," answered Boyes, pointing to their location. "The mountains are the dividing line between Uganda and the Congo. We'll have to concentrate our initial efforts in the eastern section."

"Why?" asked Roosevelt. "If we move *here*—" he pointed to a more centrally located spot "—we'll have access to the Congo River."

"Not practical," answered Boyes. "Most of the tribes in the eastern quarter of the country understand Swahili, and that's the only native language most of our men will be able to speak. Once we get inland we'll run into more that two hundred dialects, and if they speak any civilized language at all, it'll be French, not English."

"I see," said Roosevelt. He paused to consider this information, then stared at the map again. "Now, where does the East African Railway terminate?"

"Over here," said Boyes, pointing. "In Kampala, about halfway through Uganda."

"So we'll have to extend the railway or build a road about three hundred miles or more to reach a base in the eastern section of the Congo?"

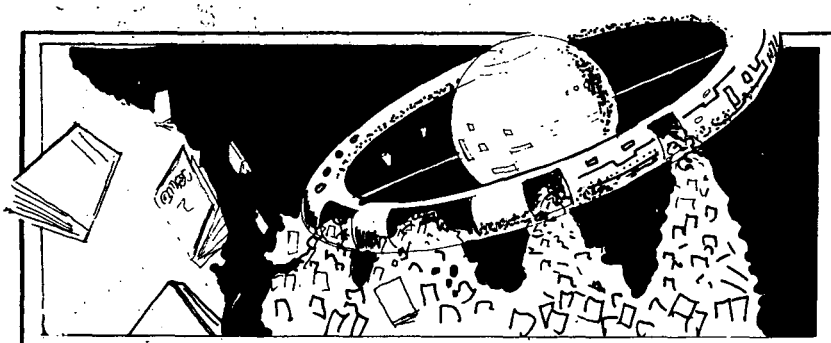
"That's a very ambitious undertaking, Mr. President," said Boyes dubiously.

"Still, it will have to be done. There's no other way to bring in the equipment we'll need." Roosevelt turned to Boyes. "You look doubtful, John."

"It could take years. The East African Railway wasn't called the Lunatic Line without cause."

Roosevelt smiled confidently. "They called it the Lunatic Line because only a lunatic would spend one thousand pounds per mile of track. Well, if there's one thing Americans can build, it's railroads. We'll do it for a tenth of the cost in a fiftieth of the time."

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"If you extend it from Kampala, you'll have to run it over the Mountains of the Moon," noted Boyes.

"We ran railroads over the Rocky Mountains almost half a century ago," said Roosevelt, dismissing the subject. "Now, are there any major cities in the eastern sector? Where's Stanleyville?"

"Stanleyville could be on a different planet, for all the commerce it has with the eastern Congo," replied Boyes. "In fact, most of the Belgian settlements are along the Congo River—" he pointed out the river "—which, as you can see, doesn't extend to the eastern section. There are no railways, no rivers, and no roads connecting the eastern sector to the settlements." He paused. "Initially, this may very well work to our advantage, as it could be months before news of anything we may do will reach them."

"Then what *is* in the east?"

Boyes shrugged. "Animals and savages."

"We'll leave the animals alone and elevate the savages," said Roosevelt. "What's the major tribe there?"

"The Mangbetu."

"Do you know anything about them?"

"Just that they're as warlike as the Maasai and the Zulu. They've conquered most of the other tribes." He paused. "And they're supposed to be cannibals."

"We'll have to put a stop to that," said Roosevelt. He flashed Boyes another grin. "We can't have them going around eating registered voters."

"Especially Republicans?" suggested Boyes with a chuckle.

"Especially Republicans," agreed Roosevelt. He paused. "Have they had much commerce with white men?"

"The Belgians leave them pretty much alone," answered Boyes. "They killed the first few civil servants who paid them a visit."

"Then it would be reasonable to assume that they will be unresponsive to our peaceful overtures?"

"I think you could say so, yes."

"Then perhaps we can draw upon your expertise, John," said Roosevelt. "After all, Kikuyuland was also hostile to white men when you first entered it."

"It was a different situation," explained Boyes. "They were warring among themselves, so I simply placed myself and my gun at the disposal of one of the weaker clans and made myself indispensable to them. Once word got out that I had sided with them and turned the tide of battle, they knew they'd be massacred if I left, so they begged me to stay, and one by one we began assimilating the other Kikuyu clans until we had unified the entire nation." He paused. "The Mangbetu are already united, and I very much doubt that they would appreciate any interference from us." He stared thoughtfully at Roosevelt. "And there's something else."

"What?"

"I didn't enter Kikuyuland to bring them the benefits of civilization.

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The East African Railway needed supplies for 25,000 coolie laborers, and all I wanted to do was find a cheap source of food that I could resell. I was just trying to make a living, not to change the way the Kikuyu lived." He paused. "African natives are a very peculiar lot. You can shoot their elephants, pull gold and diamonds out of their land, even buy their slaves, and they don't seem to give a damn. But once you start interfering with the way they live, you've got a real problem on your hands."

"There's an enormous difference between American democracy and European colonialism," said Roosevelt firmly.

"Let's hope the residents of the Congo agree, sir," said Boyes wryly.

"They will," said Roosevelt. "You know, John, this enterprise was initially your suggestion. If you feel this way, why have you volunteered to help me?"

"I've made and lost three fortunes on this continent," answered Boyes bluntly. "Some gut instinct tells me that there's another one to be made in the Congo. Besides," he added with a smile, "it sounds like a bully adventure."

Roosevelt laughed at Boyes' use of his favorite term. "Well, at least you're being honest, and I can't ask for more than that. Now let's get back to work." He paused, ordering his thoughts. "It seems to me that as long as the Mangbetu control the area, it makes sense to work through them, to use them as our surrogates until we can educate *all* the natives."

"I suppose so," said Boyes. "Still, we can't just walk in there, tell them that we're bringing them the advantages of civilization, and expect a friendly reception."

"Why not?" said Roosevelt confidently. "The direct approach is usually best."

"They're predisposed to dislike and distrust you, Mr. President."

"They're predisposed to dislike and distrust Belgians, John," answered Roosevelt. "They've never met an American before."

"I don't think they're inclined to differentiate between white men," said Boyes.

"You're viewing them as Democrats," said Roosevelt with a smile. "I prefer to think of them as uncommitted voters."

"I think you'd be better advised to think of them as hostile—and hungry."

"John, when I was president, I used to have a saying: Walk softly, but carry a big stick."

"I've heard it," acknowledged Boyes.

"Well, I intend to walk softly among the Mangbetu—but if worst comes to worst, we'll be carrying fifty big sticks with us."

"I wonder if fifty guns will be enough," said Boyes, frowning.

"We're not coming to slaughter them, John—merely to impress them."

"We might impress them more if we waited for some of your engineers and Rough Riders to show up."

"Time is a precious commodity," answered Roosevelt. "I have never believed in wasting it." He paused. "Bill Taft will almost certainly run

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for re-election in 1912. I'd like to make him a gift of the Congo as an American protectorate before he leaves office."

"You expect to civilize this whole country in six years?" asked Boyes in amused disbelief.

"Why not?" answered Roosevelt seriously. "God made the whole world in just six days, didn't He?"

IV.

They remained in camp for two days, with Roosevelt becoming more and more restless to begin his vast undertaking. Finally he convinced Boyes to trek across the mountain range, and a week later they set up a base camp on the eastern border of the Belgian Congo.

The ex-president was overflowing with energy. When Boyes would awaken at sunrise, Roosevelt had already written ten or twelve pages, and was undergoing his daily regimen of vigorous exercise. By nine in the morning he was too restless to remain in camp, and he would take a tracker and a bearer out to hunt some game for the pot. In the heat of the day, while Boyes and the porters slept in the shade, Roosevelt sat in a canvas chair beside his tent, reading from the sixty-volume library that accompanied him everywhere. By late afternoon it was time for a long walk and an hour of serious bird-watching, followed by still more writing and then dinner. And always, as he sat beside the fire with Boyes and those poachers who had begun making their way to the base camp, he would speak for hours, firing them with his vision for the Congo and discussing how best to accomplish it. Then, somewhere between nine and ten at night, everyone would go off to bed, and while the others slept, Roosevelt's tent was always aglow with lantern light as he read for another hour.

Boyes decided that if Roosevelt weren't given something substantial to do he might spontaneously combust with nervous energy. Therefore, since thirty-three members of his little company had already arrived, he broke camp and assumed that the remaining fifteen to twenty men would be able to follow their trail.

They spent two days tracking down a large bull elephant and his young *askaris*, came away with fourteen tusks, six of them quite large, and then marched them twenty miles north to a Belgian outpost. They traded the tusks for seven blooded horses, left three of their party behind to acquire more ivory and trade it for the necessary number of horses, and then headed south into Mangbetu country.

They were quite a group. There was Deaf Banks, who had lost his hearing from proximity to repeated elephant gun explosions, but had refused to quit Africa or even leave the bush, and had shot more than five hundred elephants. There was Bill Buckley, a burly Englishman who had given up his gold mine in Rhodesia for the white gold he found further north. There was Mickey Norton, who had spent a grand total

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of three days in cities during the past twenty years. There was Charlie Ross, who had left his native Australia to become a Canadian Mountie, then decided that the life was too tame and emigrated to Africa. There was Billy Pickering, who had already served two sentences in Belgian jails for ivory poaching, and had his own notions concerning how to civilize the Congo. There were William and Richard Brittlebanks, brothers who had found hunting in the Klondike to be too cold for their taste, and had been poaching ivory in the Sudan for the better part of a decade. There was even an American, Yank Rogers, one of Roosevelt's former Rough Riders, who had no use for the British or the Belgians, but joined up the moment he heard that his beloved Teddy was looking for volunteers. Only the fabled Karamojo Bell, who had just killed his 962nd elephant and was eager to finally bag his thousandth, refused to leave the Lado.

It was understood from the start that Boyes was Roosevelt's lieutenant, and the few who choose to argue the point soon found out just how much strength and determination lay hidden within his scrawny, five foot two inch body. After a pair of fist fights and a threatened pistol duel, which Roosevelt himself had to break up, the chain of command was never again challenged.

They began marching south and west, moving further from the border and into more heavily forested territory as they sought out the Mangbetu. By the time a week had passed, eighteen more men had joined them.

On the eighth day they came to a large village. The huts were made of dried cattle dung, with thatched roofs, and were clustered around a large central compound.

The inhabitants still spoke Swahili, and explained that the Mangbetu territory was another two days' march to the south. Boyes had the Brittlebanks brothers shoot a couple of bushbuck and a duiker, and made a gift of the meat to the village. He promised to bring them still more meat upon their return, explaining to Roosevelt that this was a standard practice, as one never knew when one might need a friendly village while beating a hasty retreat.

Roosevelt was eager to meet the Mangbetu, and he got his wish two mornings later, shortly after sunrise, when they came upon a Mangbetu village in a large clearing by a river.

"I wonder how many white men they've seen before?" said Roosevelt as a couple of hundred painted Mangbetu, some of them wearing blankets and leopardskin cloaks in the cold morning air, gathered in the center of the village, brandishing their spears and staring at the approaching party.

"They've probably eaten their fair share of Belgians," replied Boyes. "At any rate, they'll know what a rifle is, so we'd better display them."

"They can see that we have them," answered Roosevelt. "That's enough."

"But sir—"

"We've come to befriend them, not decimate them, John. Keep the men

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back here so they don't feel that we're threatening them," ordered Roosevelt.

"Mr. President, sir," protested Mickey Norton, "please listen to me. I've had experience dealing with savages. We all have. You've got to show 'em who's boss."

"They're not savages, Mr. Norton," said Roosevelt.

"Then what *are* they?"

Roosevelt grinned. "Voters." He climbed down off his horse. "They're our constituents, and I think I'd like to meet them on equal footing."

"Then you'd better take off all your clothes and get a spear."

"That will be enough, Mr. Norton," said Roosevelt firmly.

One old man, wearing a headdress made of a lion's mane and ostrich feathers, seated himself on a stool outside the largest hut, and a number of warriors immediately positioned themselves in front of him.

"Would that be the chief?" asked Roosevelt.

"Probably," said Boyes. "Once in a while, you get a real smart chief who puts someone else on the throne and disguises himself as a warrior, just in case you're here to kill him. But since the Mangbetu rule this territory, I think we can assume that he's really the headman."

"Nice headdress," commented Roosevelt admiringly. He handed his rifle to Norton. "John, leave your gun behind and come with me. The rest of you men, wait here."

"Would you like us to fan out around the village, sir?" suggested Charlie Ross.

Roosevelt shook his head. "If they've seen rifles before, it won't be necessary, and if they haven't, then it wouldn't do any good."

"Is there anything we *can* do, sir?"

"Try smiling," answered Roosevelt. "Come on, John."

They began approaching the cluster of warriors. A dog raced up, barking furiously. Roosevelt ignored it, and when it saw that it had failed to intimidate them, it lay down in the dust with an almost human expression of disappointment on its face and watched the two men walk past.

The warriors began murmuring, softly at first, then louder, and someone began beating a primal rhythm on the drum.

"The Lado is looking better and better with every step we take," commented Boyes under his breath.

"They're just people, John," Roosevelt assured him.

"With very unusual dietary habits," muttered Boyes.

"If you're worried, I can always have Yank act as my interpreter."

"I'm not worried about dying," answered Boyes. "I just don't want to go down in the history books as the man who led Teddy Roosevelt into a Mangbetu cooking pot."

Roosevelt chuckled. "If it happens, there won't be any survivors to write about it. Now try to be a little more optimistic." He looked ahead at the assembled Mangbetu. "What do you suppose would happen if we walked right up to the chief?"

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"He's got a couple of pretty mean-looking young bucks standing on each side of him," noted Boyes. "I wish we had our rifles."

"We won't need them, John," Roosevelt assured him. "I was always surrounded by the Secret Service when I was president—but they never interfered with my conduct of my office."

They were close enough now to smell the various oils that the Mangbetu had rubbed onto their bodies, and to see some of the patterns that had been tattooed onto their faces and torsos.

"Just keep smiling," answered Roosevelt. "We're unarmed, and our men are keeping their distance."

"Why do we have to smile?" asked Boyes.

"First, to show that we're happy to see them," said Roosevelt. "And second, to show them that we don't file our teeth."

The Mangbetu brandished their spears threateningly as Roosevelt reached them, but the old headman uttered a single command and they parted, allowing the two men a narrow path to the chief. When they got to within eight feet of him, however, four large bodyguards stepped forward and barred their way.

"John, tell him that I'm the king of America, and that I bring him greetings and felicitations."

Boyes translated Roosevelt's message. The chief stared impassively at him, and the four warriors did not relax their posture.

"Tell him that my country has no love for the Belgians."

Boyes uttered something in Swahili, and suddenly the old man seemed to show some interest. He nodded his head and responded.

"He says he's got no use for them either."

Roosevelt's smile broadened. "Tell him we're going to be great friends."

Boyes spoke to the chief again. "He wants to know why."

"Because I am going to bring him all the gifts of civilization, and I ask nothing in return except his friendship."

Another brief exchange followed. "He wants to know where the gifts of civilization are."

"Tell him they're too big for our small party of men to carry, but they're on their way."

The chief listened, finally flashed Roosevelt a smile, and turned to Boyes.

"He says any enemy of the Belgians is a friend of his."

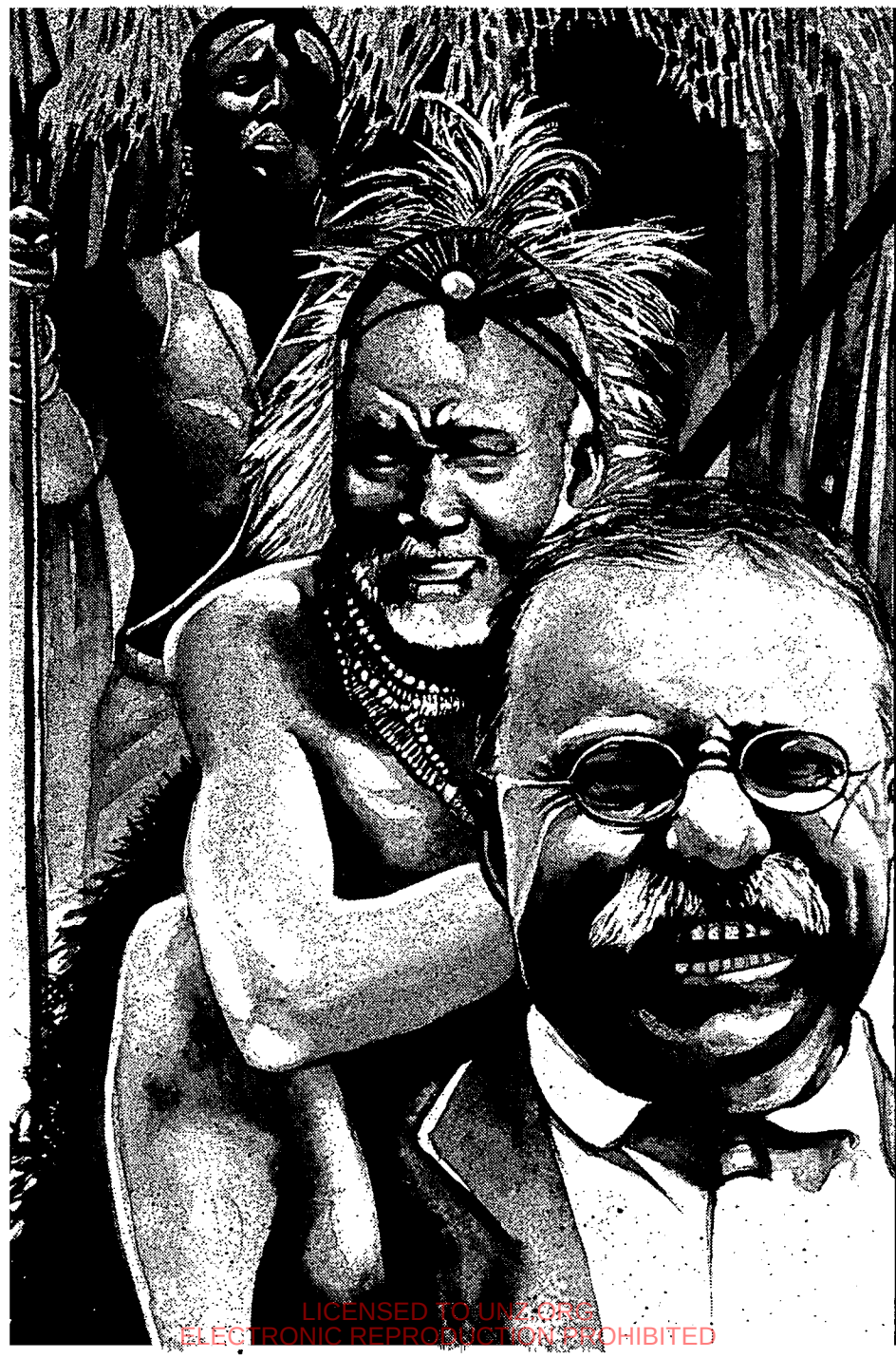
Roosevelt stepped forward and extended his hand. The chief stared at it for a moment, then hesitantly held out his own. Roosevelt took it and shook it vigorously. Two of the old man's bodyguards tensed and raised their spears again, but the chief said something to them and they immediately backed off.

"I think you startled them," offered Boyes.

"A good politician always likes to press the flesh, as we say back home," responded Roosevelt. "Tell him that we're going to bring democracy to the Congo."

"There's no word for democracy in Swahili."

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"What's the closest approximation?"

"There isn't one."

The chief suddenly began speaking. Boyes listened for a moment, then turned to Roosevelt.

"He suggests that our men leave their weapons behind and come join him in a feast celebrating our friendship."

"What do you think?"

"Maybe he's as friendly as he seems, but I don't think it would be a good idea just yet."

"All right," responded Roosevelt, holding his hand up to his glasses as a breeze brought a cloud of dust with it. "Thank him, tell him that the men have already eaten, but that you and I accept his gracious invitation while our men guard the village against the approach of any Belgians."

"He says there aren't any Belgians in the area."

"Tell him we didn't see any either, but one can't be too careful in these dangerous times, and that now that we are friends, our men are prepared to die defending his village from his Belgian oppressors."

The chief seemed somewhat mollified, and nodded his acquiescence.

"Did you ever drink *pombe?*" asked Boyes, as the chief arose and invited them into his hut.

"No," said Roosevelt. "What is it?"

"A native beer."

"You know I don't imbibe stimulants, John."

"Well, Mr. President, you're going to have to learn how to imbibe very fast, or you're going to offend our host."

"Nonsense, John," said Roosevelt. "This is a democracy. Every man is free to drink what he wants."

"Since when did it become a democracy?" asked Boyes wryly.

"Since you and I were invited to partake in dinner, rather than constitute it," said Roosevelt. "Now let's go explain all the wonders we're going to bring to the Congo."

"Has it occurred to you that you ought to be speaking to the *people* about democracy, rather than to the hereditary chief?" suggested Boyes wryly.

"You've never seen me charm the opposition, John," said Roosevelt with a confident smile. He walked to the door of the hut, then lowered his head and entered the darkened interior. "Give me three hours with him and he'll be our biggest supporter."

He was wrong. It only took ninety minutes.

V.

They spent the next two weeks marching deeper into Mangbetu territory. News of their arrival always preceded them, transmitted by huge, eight-foot drums, and their reception was always cordial, so much so that

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after the first four encounters Roosevelt allowed all of his men to enter the villages.

By their eighth day in Mangbetu country the remainder of their party had caught up with them, bringing enough horses so that all fifty-three men were mounted. Boyes assigned rotating shifts to construct camps, cook, and hunt for meat, and Roosevelt spent every spare minute trying to master Swahili. He forbade anyone to speak to him in English, and within two weeks he was able to make himself understood to the Mangbetu, although it was another month before he could discuss his visions of a democratic Congo without the aid of a translator.

"A wonderful people!" he exclaimed one night as he, Boyes, Charlie Ross and Billy Pickering sat by one of the campfires, after having enlisted yet another two thousand Mangbetu to their cause. "Clean, bright, willing to listen to new ideas. I have high hopes for our crusade, John."

Boyes threw a stone at a pair of hyenas that had been attracted by the smell of the impala they had eaten for dinner, and they raced off into the darkness, yelping and giggling.

"I don't know," he replied. "Everything's gone smoothly so far, but . . ."

"But what?"

"These people don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about, Mr. President," said Boyes bluntly.

"I was going to mention that myself," put in Charlie Ross.

"Certainly they do," said Roosevelt. "I spent the entire afternoon with Matapoli—that was his name, wasn't it?—and his Elders, explaining how we were going to bring democracy to the Congo. Didn't you see how enthused they all were?"

"There's still no word for *democracy* in Swahili," answered Boyes. "They probably think it's something to eat."

"You underestimate them, John."

"I've lived among blacks all my adult life," replied Boyes. "If anything, I tend to over-estimate them."

Roosevelt shook his head. "The problem is cultural, not racial. In America, we have many Negroes who have become doctors, lawyers, scientists, even politicians. There is nothing a white man can do that a Negro can't do, given the proper training and opportunity."

"Maybe American blacks," said Billy Pickering. "But not Africans."

Roosevelt chuckled in amusement. "Just where do you think America's Negroes came from, Mr. Pickering?"

"Not from the Congo, that's for sure," said Pickering adamantly. "Maybe West African blacks are different."

"All men are pretty much the same, if they are given the same opportunities," said Roosevelt.

"I disagree," said Boyes. "I became the king of the Kikuyu, and you're probably going to become president of the Congo. You don't see any blacks becoming king or president of white countries, do you?"

"Give them time, John, and they will."

"I'll believe it when I see it."

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"You may not live to see it, and I may not," said Roosevelt. "But one of these days it's going to happen. Take my word for it."

A lion coughed about a hundred yards away. Both men ignored it.

"Well, you're a very learned man, so if you say it's going to happen, then I suppose it is," said Boyes. "But I hope you're also right that I'll be dead and buried when that happy day occurs."

"You know," mused Roosevelt, "maybe I ought to urge some of our American Negroes to come over here. They could become the first generation of congressmen, so to speak."

"A bunch of your freed slaves set up shop in Liberia a few years back," noted Charlie Ross. "The first thing they did was to start rounding up all the native Liberians and sell them into slavery." He snorted contemptuously. "Some democracy."

"This will be different, Mr. Ross," responded Roosevelt. "These will be educated American politicians, who also just happen to be Negroes."

"Their heads would be decorating every village from here to the Sudan a week later," said Pickering with absolute certainty.

"The Belgians may be opressing the natives now," added Boyes, "but as soon as they leave, it'll be back to tribal warfare as usual." He paused. "Your democracy is going to have exactly as many political parties as there are tribes, no more and no less, and no tribal member will ever vote for anyone other than a tribal brother."

"Nonsense!" scoffed Roosevelt. "If that philosophy held true, I'd never have won a single vote outside of my home state of New York."

"We're not in America, Mr. President," responded Boyes.

"I obviously have more faith in these people than you do, John."

"Maybe that's because I know them better."

Suddenly Roosevelt grinned. "Well, it wouldn't be any fun if it was *too* easy, would it?"

Boyes smiled wryly. "I think you're in for a little more fun than you bargained for."

"God put us here to meet challenges."

"Oh," said Charlie Ross. "I was *wondering* why He put us here."

"That's blasphemy, Mr. Ross," said Roosevelt sternly. "I won't hear any more of it."

The men fell silent, and a few moments later, when the fire started dying down, Roosevelt went off to his tent to read.

"He's biting off more than he can chew, John," said Billy Pickering when the ex-president was out of earshot.

"Maybe," said Boyes noncommittally.

"There's no maybe about it," said Pickering. "He hasn't lived with Africans. *We* have. You know what they're like."

"There's another problem, too, John," added Ross.

"Oh?" said Boyes.

"I have a feeling he thinks of us as the Rough Riders, all in for the long haul. But the long rains are coming in a couple of months, and I've got to get my ivory to Mombasa before then. So do a lot of the others."

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"You're making a big mistake, Charlie," said Boyes. "He's offering us a whole country. There's not just ivory here; there's gold and silver and copper as well, and *somebody* is going to have to administer it. If you leave now, we may not let you come back."

"You'd stop me?" asked Ross, amused.

"I've got no use for deserters," answered Boyes seriously.

"I never signed any enlistment papers. How can I be a deserter?"

"You can be a deserter by leaving the president when he needs every man he can get."

"Look, John," said Ross. "If I thought there was one chance in a hundred that he could pull this off, I'd stay, no question about it. But we've all managed to accumulate some ivory, and we've had a fine time together, and we haven't had to fight the Belgians yet. Maybe it's time to think about pulling out, while we're still ahead of the game."

Boyes shook his head. "He's a great man, Charlie, and he's capable of great things."

"Even if he does what he says he's going to do, do you really want to live in the Congo forever?"

"I'll live anywhere the pickings are easy," answered Boyes. "And if you're smart, so will you."

"I'll have to think about it, John," said Ross, getting up and heading off toward his tent.

"How about you, Billy?" asked Boyes.

"I came here for just one reason," answered Pickering. "To kill Belgians. We haven't seen any yet, so I guess I'll stick around a little longer." Then he, too, got up and walked away.

The little Yorkshireman remained by the dying embers for a few more minutes, wondering just how much time Roosevelt had before everything fell apart.

VI.

Two months into what Roosevelt termed their "bully undertaking" they finally ran into some organized resistance. To nobody's great surprise, it came not from the various tribes they had been enlisting in their project, but from the Belgian colonial government.

Despite the imminent arrival of the long rains, Roosevelt's entire party was still in the Congo, due mostly to the threats, pleadings, and promises of riches that Boyes had made when the ex-president was out of earshot.

They had made their way through a dense forest and were now camped by a winding, crocodile-infested river. A dozen of the men were out hunting for ivory, and Pickering was scouting about thirty miles to the west with a Mangbetu guide, seeking a location for their next campsite. Three more members of the party were visiting large Mangbetu villages, scheduling visits from the "king of America" and arranging for word to be passed to the leaders of the smaller villages, most of whom wanted to

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come and listen to him speak of the wonders he planned to bring to the Congo.

Roosevelt was sitting on a canvas chair in front of his tent, his binoculars hung around his neck and a sheaf of papers laid out on a table before him, editing what he had written that morning, when Yank Rogers, clad in his trademark stovepipe chaps and cowboy stetson, approached him.

"We got company, Teddy," he announced in his gentle Texas drawl.

"Oh?"

Rogers nodded. "Belgians—and they look like they're ready to declare war before lunch."

"Mr. Pickering will be heartbroken when he finds out," remarked Roosevelt wryly. He wiped some sweat from his face with a handkerchief. "Send them away, and tell them we'll only speak to the man in charge."

"In charge of what?" asked Rogers, puzzled.

"The Congo," answered Roosevelt. "We're going to have to meet him sooner or later. Why should we march all the way to Stanleyville?"

"What if they insist?"

"How big is their party?" asked Roosevelt.

"One guy in a suit, six in uniforms," said Rogers.

"Take twenty of our men with you, and make sure they're all carrying their rifles. The Belgians won't insist."

"Right, Teddy."

"Oh, and Yank?"

The American stopped. "Yes?"

"Tell Mr. Boyes not to remove their wallets before they leave."

Rogers grinned. "That little bastard could find an angle on a baseball. You know he's taking 10 percent off the top on all the ivory our men shoot?"

"No, I didn't know. Has anyone objected?"

"Not since he went up against Big Bill Buckley and gave him a whipping," laughed Rogers. "I think he's got notions of taking a percentage of every tusk that's shipped out of the Congo from now till Doomsday." He paused. "Well, I'd better round up a posse and go have a pow-wow with our visitors."

"Do that," said Roosevelt, spotting an insect that was crawling across his papers and flicking it to the ground. "And send Mr. Boyes over here. I think I'd better have a talk with him."

"If you're going to fight him, I think I can get three-to-one on you," said Rogers. "The rest of 'em never saw you take out that machine gun nest single-handed at San Juan Hill; *I* did. Want me to put a little something down for you, Teddy?"

Roosevelt chuckled at the thought. "Maybe a pound or two, if it comes to that. Which," he added seriously, "it won't."

Rogers went off to gather some of the men, and a few minutes later Boyes approached Roosevelt's tent.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. President?" he asked.

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"Yes, I did, John."

"Is it anything to do with the Belgians? Yank Rogers said you were sending them away."

"They'll be back," said Roosevelt, wiping his face once again and wondering if he'd ever experienced this much humidity anywhere in America. "Pull up a chair, John."

Boyes did so, and sat down opposite Roosevelt.

"John, Yank tells me that you've got a healthy little business going on here."

"You mean the ivory?" asked Boyes, making no attempt to conceal it.

Roosevelt nodded. "We're not here to get rich, John. We're here to turn the Congo into a democracy."

"There's no law against doing both," said Boyes.

"I strongly disapprove of it, John. It's profiteering."

"I'm not making a single shilling off the natives, Mr. President," protested Boyes. "How can that be profiteering?"

"You're making it off our own people," said Roosevelt. "That's just as bad."

"I was afraid you were going to look at it like that," said Boyes with a sigh. "Look, Mr. President, we're all for civilizing the Congo—but we're grown men, and we've got to make a living. Now, for most of them, that means ivory hunting when we're not busy befriending the natives. Believe me when I tell you that if you were to forbid it, 80 percent of the men would leave."

"I believe you, John," said Roosevelt. "And I haven't stopped them from hunting ivory whenever they've had the time."

"Well, I haven't got any spare time, between running the camp and acting as your second-in-command," continued Boyes, "so if I'm to make any money, it can't be by spending long days in the bush, hunting for ivory. So unless you see fit to pay me a salary, this seems like the most reasonable way of earning some money. It doesn't cost you anything, it doesn't cost the natives anything, and every one of our men knew the conditions before they signed on."

Roosevelt considered Boyes' argument for a moment, then nodded his consent.

"All right, John. Far be it from me to stand in the way of a entrepreneur." He paused for a moment. "But I want you to promise me one thing."

"What?"

"You'll let me know before you indulge in any other plans to get rich."

"Oh, I'm never without plans, Mr. President," Boyes assured him.

"Would you care to confide in me, then?"

"Why not?" replied Boyes with a shrug. "I've got nothing to hide." He leaned forward in his chair. "Once you start putting your railroad through here, you're going to need about ten thousand laborers. Now, I don't know if you're going to draft some workers from the local tribes, or hire a bunch of coolies from British East, or import all your labor from

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America—but I *do* know that ten thousand men eat a lot of food. I thought I'd set up a little trading company to deal with some of the tribes; you know, give them things they want in exchange for bags of flour and other edibles." He paused. "It'll be the same thing I did with the Kikuyu when they built the Lunatic Line, and I kept 25,000 coolies fed for the better part of two years."

"I don't want you fleecing the same people we're trying to befriend," said Roosevelt. "We're here to liberate this country, not plunder it."

"If they don't like what I have to trade, they don't have to part with their goods," said Boyes. "And if they *do* like it, I'll undersell any competitor by 50 percent, which will save your fledgling treasury a lot of money."

Roosevelt stared at him for a long moment.

"Well?" said Boyes at last.

"John, if you can save us that much money without cheating the natives, get as rich as you like."

Boyes smiled. "I don't mind if I do, Mr. President."

"You're a remarkable man, John."

Boyes shook his head. "I'm just a skinny little guy who had to learn to use his head to survive with all these brawny white hunters."

"I understand you gave one of them quite a lesson in fisticuffs," remarked Roosevelt.

"You mean Buckley? I had no choice in the matter," answered Boyes. "If I'd let him get away with it, by next week they'd all be backing out on their bargain." Suddenly he smiled again. "I gave him a bottle of gin and helped him finish it, and by the next morning we were good friends again."

"You're in the wrong profession, John," said Roosevelt. "You should have been a politician."

"Not enough money in it," answered Boyes bluntly. "But while we're on the subject of politics, why did we run the Belgians off? Sooner or later we're going to have to deal with them."

"It's simply a matter of practicality," answered Roosevelt. "I think we gave them enough of an insult that the governor of the Congo will have to come here in person to prove that we can't get away with such behavior—and the sooner we meet with him, the sooner we can present our demands."

"What, exactly, do we plan to demand?"

"We're going to demand their complete withdrawal from the Congo, and we're going to stipulate that they must make a public statement in the world press that they no longer have any colonial ambitions in Africa."

"You're not asking for much, are you?" said Boyes sardonically.

"The Belgians have no use for it, and it costs them a fortune to administer it." Roosevelt paused. "King Albert can go find another hunting reserve. We've got a nation to build here."

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Boyes laughed in amusement. "And you think they're going to turn it over to a force of fifty-three men?"

"Certainly not," said Roosevelt. "They're going to turn it over to the natives who live here."

Boyes stared intently at Roosevelt. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"That *is* what we've come here for, isn't it?"

"Yes, but—"

"We have a job to do, John, and time is the one irreplaceable commodity in this world. We can't afford to waste it."

"Are you sure you're not being a little premature about this, Mr. President?" asked Boyes. "I thought we'd spend a year building a native army, and—"

"We can't win a war with the Belgians, John."

"Then what kind of pressure can you bring to bear on them?" asked Boyes, puzzled.

"We can theaten to *lose* a war with them."

Boyes frowned. "I don't think I quite understand, sir."

"You will, John," said Roosevelt confidently. "You will."

VII.

It took the Assistant Governor of the Congo exactly seven weeks to hear of Roosevelt's summary dismissal of his district representative and to trek from Stanleyville to the American's base camp, by which time the rains had come and gone and the ex-president had enlisted not only the entire Mangbetu nation to his cause, but seven lesser tribes as well.

Word of the Belgians' impending arrival reached camp a full week before they actually showed up—"God, I love those drums!" was Roosevelt's only comment—and Yank Rogers and the Brittlebanks brothers were sent out to greet the party and escort them back to camp.

Roosevelt ordered Boyes to send five of their men out on a two-week hunting expedition. When the little Yorkshireman asked what they were supposed to be hunting for, Roosevelt replied that he didn't much care, as long as they were totally out of communication for at least fourteen days. Boyes shrugged, scratched his head, and finally selected five of his companions at random and suggested they do a little ivory hunting far to the south for the next two weeks. Since they had virtually shot out the immediate area, he received no objections.

When the Belgian party finally reached the camp, Roosevelt was waiting for them. He had had his men construct a huge table, some thirty feet long and five feet wide, and the moment they dismounted he invited them to join him and his men for lunch. The Assistant Governor, a tall, lean, ambitious man named Gerard Silva, seemed somewhat taken aback by the American's hospitality, but allowed himself and his twenty armed soldiers to be escorted to the table, where a truly magnificent feast of warthog, bushbuck, and guinea fowl awaited them.

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Roosevelt's men, such as could fit on one side of the table, sat facing the west, and the Belgian soldiers were seated opposite them. The American sat at the head of the table, and Silva sat at the foot of it, thirty feet away. Under such an arrangement, private discussion between the two leaders was impossible, and Roosevelt encouraged his men to discuss their hunting and exploring adventures, though not more than half a dozen of the Belgian soldiers could speak or understand English.

Finally, after almost two hours, the meal was concluded, and Roosevelt's men—except for Boyes—left the table one by one. Silva nodded to a young lieutenant, and the Belgian soldiers followed suit, clustering awkwardly around their horses. Then Silva stood up, walked down to Roosevelt's end of the table, and seated himself next to the American.

"I hope you enjoyed your meal, Mr. Silva," said Roosevelt, sipping a cup of tea.

"It was quite excellent, Mr. . . . ?" Silva paused. "What would you prefer that I call you?"

"Colonel Roosevelt, Mr. Roosevelt, or Mr. President, as you prefer," said Roosevelt expansively.

"It was an excellent meal, Mr. Roosevelt," said Silva in precise, heavily accented English. He withdrew a cigar and offered one to Roosevelt, who refused it. "A wise decision," he said. "The tobacco we grow here is decidedly inferior."

"You must be anxious to return to Belgium, then," suggested Roosevelt.

"As you must be anxious to return to America," responded Silva.

"Actually, I like it here," said Roosevelt. "But then, I don't smoke."

"A nasty habit," admitted Silva. "But then, so is trespassing."

"*Am* I trespassing?" asked Roosevelt innocently.

"Do not be coy with me, Mr. Roosevelt," said Silva. "It is most unbecoming. You have brought a force of men into Belgian territory for reasons that have not been made clear to us. You have no hunting permit, no visa, no permission to be here at all."

"Are you telling us to leave?"

"I am simply trying to discover your purpose here," said Silva. "If you have come solely for sport, I will personally present you with papers that will allow you to go anywhere you wish within the Congo. If you have come for some other reason, I demand to know what it is."

"I would rather discuss that with the governor himself," responded Roosevelt.

"He is quite ill with malaria, and may not be able to leave Stanleyville for another month."

Roosevelt considered the statement for a moment, then shook his head. "No, we've wasted enough time already. I suppose you'll simply have to take my message to him." He paused. "I suppose it doesn't make much difference. The only thing he'll do is transmit my message to King Albert."

"And what is the gist of your message, Mr. Roosevelt?" asked Silva, leaning forward intently.

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"My men and I don't consider ourselves to be in Belgian territory."

Silva smiled humorlessly. "Perhaps you would like me to pinpoint your position on a map. You are indeed within the legal boundaries of the Belgian Congo."

"We know where we are, and we fully agree that we are inside the border of the Congo," answered Roosevelt. "But we don't recognize your authority here."

"Here? You mean right where we are sitting?"

"I mean anywhere in the Congo."

"The Congo is Belgian territory, Mr. Roosevelt."

Roosevelt shook his head. "The Congo belongs to its inhabitants. It's time they began determining their own future."

"That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard," said Silva. "It has been acknowledged by all the great powers that the Congo is our colony."

"All but one," said Roosevelt.

"America acknowledges our right to the Congo."

"America has a history of opposing imperialism wherever we find it," replied Roosevelt. "We threw the British out of our own country, and we're fully prepared to throw the Belgians out of the Congo."

"Just as, when you were president, you threw the Panamanians out of Panama?" asked Silva sardonically.

"America has no imperial claim to Panama. The Panamanians have their own government and we recognize it." Roosevelt paused. "However, we're not talking about Panama, but about the Congo."

Silva stared at Roosevelt. "For whom do you speak, Mr. Roosevelt?" asked Silva. "You are no longer president, so surely you do not speak for America."

"I speak for the citizens of the Congo."

Silva laughed contemptuously. "They are a bunch of savages who have no interest whatsoever in who rules them."

"Would you care to put that to a vote?" asked Roosevelt with a smile.

"So they vote now?"

"Not yet," answered Roosevelt. "But they will as soon as they are free to do so."

"And who will set them free?"

"*We* will," interjected Boyes from his seat halfway down the table.

"*You* will?" repeated Silva, turning to face Boyes. "I've heard about you, John Boyes. You have been in trouble with every government from South Africa to Abyssinia."

"I don't get along well with colonial governments," replied Boyes.

"You don't get along well with native governments, either," said Silva. He turned to Roosevelt. "Did you know that your companion talked the ignorant natives who proclaimed him their king into selling him Mount Kenya for the enormous price of four goats?"

"Six," Boyes corrected him with a smile. "I wouldn't want it said that I was cheap."

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"This is ridiculous!" said Silva in exasperation. "I cannot believe I am hearing this! Do you really propose to conquer the Belgian Congo with a force of fifty-three men?"

"Absolutely not," said Roosevelt pleasantly.

"Well, then?"

"First," said Roosevelt, "it is the Congo, not the Belgian Congo. Second, we don't propose to conquer it, but to liberate it. And third, your intelligence is wrong. There are only forty-eight men in my party."

"Forty-eight, fifty-three—what is the difference?"

"Oh, there is a difference, Mr. Silva," said Roosevelt. He paused. "The other five are halfway to Nairobi by now."

"What do they propose to do once they get there?" asked Silva suspiciously.

"They propose to tell the American press that Teddy Roosevelt—who is, in all immodesty, the most popular and influential American of the past half century—is under military attack by the Belgian government. His brave little force is standing firm, but he can't hold out much longer without help, and if he should die while trying to free the citizens of the Congo from the yoke of Belgian tyranny, he wants America to know that he died at the hands of King Albert, who, I believe, has more than enough problems in Europe without adding this to his burden."

"You are mad!" exclaimed Silva. "Do you really think anyone will care what happens here?"

"That is probably just what the Mahdi said to Chinese Gordon at the fall of Khartoum," said Roosevelt easily. "Read your history books and you'll see what happened when the British people learned of his death."

"You are bluffing!"

"You are welcome to think so," replied Roosevelt calmly. "But in two months' time, fifty thousand Americans will be standing in line to fight at my side in the Congo—and if you kill me, you can multiply that number by one hundred, and most of them will want to take the battle right to Belgium."

"This is the most preposterous thing I have ever heard!" exclaimed Silva.

Roosevelt reached into a pocket of his hunting jacket and pulled out a thick, official-looking document he had written the previous day.

"It's all here in black and white, Mr. Silva. I suggest that you deliver it to your superior as quickly as possible, because he'll want to send it on to Belgium, and I know how long these things take." He paused. "We'd like you out of the Congo in six months, so you can see that there's no time to waste."

"We are going nowhere!"

Roosevelt sighed deeply. "I'm afraid you are up against an historic inevitability," he said. "You have twenty armed men. I have forty-seven, not counting myself. It would be suicidal for you to attack us here and now, and by the time you return from Stanleyville, I'll have a force of

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more than thirty thousand Mangbetu plus a number of other tribes, who will not be denied their independence any longer."

"My men are a trained military force," said Silva. "Yours are a ragtag band of outcasts and poachers."

"But good shots," said Roosevelt with a confident grin. He paused again and the grin vanished. "Besides, if you succeed in killing me, you'll be the man who precipitated a war with the United States. Are you quite certain you want that responsibility?"

Silva was silent for a moment. Finally he spoke.

"I will return to Stanleyville," he announced. "But I will be back. This I promise you."

"We won't be here," answered Roosevelt.

"Where will you be?"

"I have no idea—but I have every intention of remaining alive until news of what's happening here gets back to America." Roosevelt paused and smiled. "The Congo is a large country, Mr. Silva. I plan to make many more friends here while awaiting Belgium's decision."

Silva got abruptly to his feet. "With this paper," he said, holding up the document, "you have signed not only your own death warrant, but the death warrant of every man who follows you."

Boyes laughed from his position halfway down the table. "Do you know how many death warrants have been issued on me? I'll just add this one to my collection." He paused, amused. "I've never had one written in French before."

"You are both mad!" snapped Silva, stalking off toward his men.

Roosevelt watched the assistant governor mount his horse and gallop off, followed by his twenty soldiers.

"I suppose we should have invited him to stay for dinner," he remarked pleasantly.

"You don't really think this is going to work, do you?" asked Boyes.

"Certainly."

"It's a lot of fancy talk, but it boils down to the fact that we're still only fifty-three men," said Boyes. "You'll never get the natives to go to war with the Belgians. They haven't any guns, and even if they did, we can't prepare them to fight a modern war in just six months' time."

"John, you know Africa and you know hunting," answered Roosevelt seriously, "but I know politics and I know history. The Congo is an embarrassment to the Belgians; Leopold wasted so much money here that his own government took it away from him two years ago. Furthermore, Europe is heading hell-for-leather for a war such as it has never seen before. The last thing they need is a battle with America over a piece of territory they didn't really want to begin with."

"They must want it or they wouldn't be here," said Boyes stubbornly.

Roosevelt shook his head. "They just didn't want anyone else to have it. When Africa was divided among the great powers in 1885, Belgium would have lost face if it hadn't insisted on its right to colonize the Congo, but it's been an expensive investment that has been a financial drain

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and a political embarrassment for more than two decades." He paused. "And what I said about General Gordon was true. He refused to leave Khartoum, and his death eventually forced the British government to take over the Sudan when the public demanded that they avenge him." Suddenly Roosevelt grinned. "A lot more people voted for me than ever even heard of Gordon. Believe me, John, the Belgian government will bluster and threaten for a month or two, and then they'll start negotiating."

"Well, it all sounds logical," said Boyes. "But I still can't believe that a force of fifty-three men can take over an entire country. It's just not possible."

"Once and for all, John, we are *not* a force of fifty-three men," said Roosevelt. "We are a *potential* force of a million outraged Americans."

"So you keep saying. But still—"

"John, I trust you implicitly when we're stalking an elephant or a lion. Try to have an equal degree of trust in me when we're doing what *I* do best."

"I wish I could," said Boyes. "But it just *can't* be this easy."

On December 3, 1910, five months and twenty-seven days after receiving Roosevelt's demands, the Belgian government officially relinquished all claims to the Congo, and began withdrawing their nationals.

VIII.

"*Damn* that Taft!"

Roosevelt crumpled the telegram, which had been delivered by runner from Stanleyville, in his massive hand and threw it to the ground. The sound of his angry, high-pitched voice combined with the violence of his gesture frightened a number of birds that had been searching for insects on the sprawling lawn, and they flew, squawking and screeching, to sanctuary in a cluster of nearby trees.

"Bad news, Mr. President?" asked Boyes.

They were staying at the house of M. Beauregard de Vincennes, a French plantation owner, some fifteen miles west of Stanleyville, on the shores of the Congo River. Three dozen of Roosevelt's men were camped out on the grounds, while the remainder were alternately hunting ivory and preparing the Lulua and Baluba, two of the major tribes in the area, for visits from Roosevelt himself.

"The man has no gratitude, no gratitude at all!" snapped Roosevelt. "I gave him the presidency, handed it to him as a gift, and now I've offered to give him a foothold in Africa as well, and he has the unmitigated gall to tell me that he can't afford to send me the men and the money I've requested!"

"Is he sending anything at all?" asked Boyes.

"I requested ten thousand men, and he's sending six hundred!" said Roosevelt furiously. "I told him I needed at least twenty million dollars

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to build roads and extend the railroad from Uganda, and he's offered three million. Three million dollars for a country a third the size of the United States! *Damn* the man! J. P. Morgan may be a scoundrel and a brigand, but *he* would recognize an opportunity like this and pounce on it, I'll guarantee you that!" He paused and suddenly nodded his head vigorously. "By God, that's what I'll do! I'll wire Morgan this afternoon!"

"I thought he was your mortal enemy," remarked Boyes. "At least, that's the way it sounds whenever you mention him."

"Nonsense!" said Roosevelt. "We were on different sides of the political fence, but he's a competent man, which is more than I can say for the idiot sitting in the White House." Roosevelt grinned. "And he loves railroads. Yes, I'll wire him this afternoon."

"Are we refusing President Taft's offer, then?"

"Certainly not. We need all the manpower and money we can get. I'll wire our acceptance, and send off some telegrams to a few sympathetic newspaper publishers telling them what short shrift we're getting from Washington. I can't put any more pressure on Taft from here, but perhaps *they* can." Roosevelt shook his head sadly. "It serves me right for putting a fool in the White House. I tell you, John, if I didn't have a job to do right here, I'd go back to the States and take the nomination away from him in 1912. The man doesn't deserve to run a second time."

Roosevelt ranted against the "fat fool" in the White House for another fifteen minutes, then retired to his room to draft his telegrams. When he emerged an hour later for lunch, he was once again his usual pleasant, vigorous, optimistic self. Boyes, Bill Buckley, Mickey Norton, Yank Rogers, and Deaf Banks were sitting at a table beneath an ancient tree, and all of them except Banks, who hadn't heard the ex-president's approach, stood up as he joined them.

"Please be seated, gentlemen," said Roosevelt, pulling up a chair. "What's on the menu for this afternoon?"

"Salad and cold guinea hen in some kind of sauce," answered Norton. "Or that's what Madame Vincennes told me, anyway."

"I love guinea fowl," enthused Roosevelt. "That will be just bully!" He paused. "Good people, Monsieur and Madame Vincennes. I'm delighted that they offered to be our hosts." He paused. "This is much more pleasant than being cooped up in those airless little government buildings in Stanleyville."

"I hear we got some bad news from your pal Bill Taft," ventured Rogers.

"It's all taken care of," answered Roosevelt, confidently tapping the pocket that held his telegrams. "The men he's sending will arrive during the rainy season, anyway—and by the time the rains are over, we'll have more than enough manpower." He looked around the table. "It's time we considered some more immediate problems, gentlemen."

"What problems did you have in mind, sir?" asked Buckley, as six black servants approached the table, bearing trays of salad and drinks.

"We've had this country for two months now," answered Roosevelt.

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"It's time we began doing something with it—besides decimating its elephant population, that is," he added harshly.

"Well, we could decimate the Belgians that have stayed behind," said Buckley with an amused smile. "Billy Pickering would like that."

"I'm being serious, Mr. Buckley," said Roosevelt, taking a small crust of bread from his plate and tossing it to a nearby starling, which immediately picked it up and pranced off with it. "What's the purpose of making the Belgians leave if we don't improve the lot of the inhabitants? Everywhere we've gone we've promised to bring the benefits of democracy to the Congo. I think it's time we started delivering on that promise. The people deserve no less."

"Boy!" said Norton to one of the servants. "This coffee's cold. Go heat it up."

The servant nodded, bowed, put the coffee pot back on the tray, and walked toward the kitchen building.

"I don't know how you're going to civilize them when they can't remember from one day to the next that coffee's supposed to be served hot and not warm," said Norton. "And look at the way he's loafing: it could be hot when he gets it and cold by the time he brings it here."

"The natives don't drink coffee, so it can hardly be considered important to them," answered Roosevelt.

"They don't vote, or hold trial by jury, either," offered Buckley.

"Well, if we're to introduce them to the amenities of civilization, I think that voting and jury trials come well ahead of coffee drinking, Mr. Buckley."

"They can't even read," said Buckley. "How are you going to teach them to vote?"

"I plan to set up a public school system throughout the country," said Roosevelt. "The Belgian missionaries made a start, but they were undermanned and under-financed. In my pocket is a telegram that will appear in more than a thousand American newspapers, an open appeal to teachers and missionaries to come to the Congo and help educate the populace."

"That could take years, sir," noted Boyes.

"Ten at the most," answered Roosevelt confidently.

"How will you pay 'em, Teddy?" asked Rogers. "Hell, you can't even pay *us*."

"The missionaries will be paid by their churches, of course," said Roosevelt. "As for the teachers, I suppose we'll have to pay them with land initially."

"That might not sit too well with the people whose land we're giving away," noted Rogers.

"Yank, if there's one thing the Congo abounds in, besides insects and humidity, it's land."

"You say it'll take ten years to educate them," continued Rogers. "How will you hold elections in the meantime?"

"By voice," answered Roosevelt. "Every man and woman will enter the

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polling place and state his or her preference. As a matter of fact, there will probably be a lot less vote fraud that way."

"Did I hear you say that women are going to vote too, Teddy?" asked Yank Rogers.

"They're citizens of the Congo, aren't they?"

"But they don't even vote back home!"

"That's going to change," said Roosevelt firmly. "Our founding fathers were wrong not to give women the right to vote, and there's no reason to make the same mistake here. They're human beings, the same as us, and they deserve the same rights and privileges." Suddenly he grinned. "I pity the man who has to tell my Alice that she can't cast her vote at the polls. There won't be enough of him left to bury!"

"You know, we could raise money with a hut tax," suggested Buckley. "That's what the British have done wherever they've had an African colony."

"A hut tax?" asked Roosevelt.

Buckley nodded. "Tax every native ten or twenty shillings a year for each hut he erects. It not only raises money for the treasury, but it forces them to be something more than subsistence farmers, since they need money to pay the tax."

Roosevelt shook his head adamantly. "We're supposed to be freeing them, Mr. Buckley, not enslaving them."

"Besides," added Boyes, "it never worked that well in British East. If they didn't pay their hut tax, the government threw them into jail." He turned to Roosevelt and smiled. "You know what the Kikuyu and Wakamba called the jail in Nairobi? The King Georgi Hoteli. It was the only place they knew of where they could get three square meals a day and a free roof over their heads." He chuckled at the memory. "Once word of it got out, they were lining up to get thrown in jail."

"Well, there will be no such attempt to exploit the natives of the Congo," said Roosevelt. "We must always remember that this is *their* country and that our duty is to teach them the ways of democracy."

"That may be easier said than done," said Rogers.

"Why should you think so, Yank?" asked Roosevelt.

"Democracy's a pretty alien concept to them," answered Rogers. "It's going to take some getting used to."

"It was an alien concept to young Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver, too," said Roosevelt, "but they seem to have adapted to it readily enough. It's never difficult to get used to freedom."

"We ain't talking freedom, Teddy," said Rogers. "They were free for thousands of years before the Belgians showed up, but they ain't never had a democracy. Their tribes are ruled by chiefs and witch doctors, not congressmen."

"And now that the Belgians are clearing out," added Norton, "our biggest problem is going to be to stop them from killing each other long enough to get to the polls."

"All of you keep predicting the most dire consequences," said Roosevelt

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irritably, "and yet you ignore the enormous strides the American Negro has taken since the Emancipation Proclamation. I tell you, gentlemen, that freedom has no color and democracy is not the special province of one race."

Boyes smiled, and Buckley turned to him.

"What are you looking so amused about, John? You've been here long enough to know everything we've said is the truth."

"You all think you're discouraging Mr. Roosevelt, and that if you tell him enough stories about how savage the natives are, maybe you'll convince him to join you long enough to kill every last elephant in the Congo and then go back to Nairobi." Boyes paused. "But I know him a little better than you do, and if there's one thing he can't resist, it's a challenge." He turned to Roosevelt. "Am I right, sir?"

Roosevelt grinned back at him. "Absolutely, Mr. Boyes." He looked around at his companions. "Gentlemen," he announced, "I've heard enough doomsaying for one day. It's time to roll up our sleeves and get to work."

IX.

Roosevelt stared at his image in the full-length ornate gilt mirror that adorned the parlor of the state house at Stanleyville, and adjusted the tie of his morning suit.

"Good thing that little German tailor decided not to leave," he remarked to Boyes, who was similarly clad, "or we'd be conducting matters of state in our safari clothes."

"I'd be a damned sight more comfortable in them," replied Boyes, checking his appearance in the mirror, and deciding that his hair needed more combing.

"Nonsense, John," said Roosevelt. "We've got reporters and photographers from all over the world here."

"Personally, I'd much rather face a charging elephant," said Boyes, looking out the window. "I don't like crowds."

Roosevelt smiled. "I'd forgotten just how much I *miss* them." He put on his top hat and walked to the door. "Well, we might as well begin."

Boyes, unhappy and uncomfortable, and feeling quite naked without his pistol and rifle, followed the American out the front door to the raised wooden platform that had been constructed in front of the state house the previous day. The press was there, as Roosevelt had said: reporters and photographers from America, Belgium, England, France, Italy, Portugal, Kenya, and even a pair of Orientals had made the long, arduous trek to Stanleyville to hear this speech and record the moment for posterity. Seated on the front row of chairs, in a section reserved for VIPs and dignitaries, were the paramount chiefs of the Mangbetu, the Simba, the Mongo, the Luba, the Bwaka, the Zande, and the Kongo (which centuries ago had given the country its name). There was even a pair

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of pygmy chiefs, one of whom was completely naked except for a loincloth, a pair of earrings, and a necklace made of leopards' claws, while the other wore a suit that could have been tailored on Saville Row.

The crowd, some six hundred strong, and divided almost equally between whites and black Africans, immediately ceased its chattering when Roosevelt mounted the platform and waited in polite expectation while he walked to a podium and pulled some notes out of his pocket.

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I thank you for your attendance and patience. I realize that, with our transportation system not yet constructed, you may have had some slight difficulty in reaching Stanleyville—" he paused for the good-natured laughter that he knew would follow "—but you're here now, and we're delighted to have you as the guests of our new nation."

He paused, pulled a brand-new handkerchief out of his pocket, and wiped away the sweat that had begun pouring down his face.

"We are here to proclaim the sovereignty of this beautiful land. Some years ago it was known as the Congo Free State. At the time, that was a misnomer, for it was anything but free. Today it is no longer a misnomer, and so it shall once again be known as the Congo Free State, an independent nation dedicated to the preservation of human dignity and the celebration of human endeavor."

A pair of blue touracos began shrieking in a nearby tree, and he smiled and waited a few seconds until the noise had subsided.

"What's past is past," he continued, "and the Congo Free State begins life with a clean slate. It bears no rancor toward any person or any nation that may have exploited its resources and its people in the past. But—" and here Roosevelt's chin jutted out pugnaciously "—this land will never be plundered or exploited again." He stared darkly out at his audience. "Never again will a privileged minority impose its will upon the majority. Never again will one tribe bear arms against another. Never again will women do most of the work and reap none of the benefits. And never again will the dreadful specters of ignorance, poverty, and disease run rampant in what Henry Stanley termed Darkest Africa." He raised his voice dramatically. "From this day forward, we shall illuminate the Congo Free State with the light of democracy, and turn it into the exemplar of Brightest Africa!"

Roosevelt paused long enough for his words to be translated, then smiled and nodded as the row of chiefs rose to their feet and cheered wildly, followed, somewhat less enthusiastically, by the Europeans.

"Thank you, my friends," he continued when the chiefs finally sat down. "We who have been fortunate enough to help in the birth of the Congo Free State have great plans for its future." He smiled triumphantly. "Great plans, indeed!" he repeated emphatically.

"Within two years, we will extend the East African Railway from its present terminus in Uganda all the way to Stanleyville, and within another year to Leopoldville. This will give us access to the Indian Ocean, as the Congo River gives us access to the Atlantic, and with the modern

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farming methods we plan to introduce, we will shortly be shipping exports in great quantity to both coasts."

There was more applause, a little less rabid this time, as most of the chiefs had only the haziest understanding of an economy that extended beyond their own tribes.

"We will construct public schools throughout the country," Roosevelt added. "Our goal is nothing less than 100 percent literacy by the year 1930."

This time the applause came only from the chiefs, as the whites in the audience looked openly skeptical.

"We will soon begin the construction of modern hospitals in every major city in the Congo Free State," continued Roosevelt, "and no citizen shall ever again want for medical care. American engineers will build dams the length of the Congo River, so that we can generate all the electricity that a modern nation will need. While leaving vast tracts of land untouched as national parks and game reserves, we will nonetheless crisscross the country with a network of roads, so that no village, no matter how remote, remains inaccessible."

He paused and glared at the disbelieving white faces in his audience.

"We will do everything I have said," he concluded. "And we will do it sooner than you think!"

The assembled chiefs began cheering and jumping around in their enthusiasm and the remainder of the audience, sensing that he had concluded the major part of his address, applauded politely.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, if you will all rise, we will, for the very first time, raise the flag of the Congo Free State." He turned to Boyes. "Mr. Boyes?"

Boyes withdrew the folded flag that he had been carrying inside his morning coat, waited for an honor guard of khaki-clad native soldiers to approach, and solemnly handed the flag over to their leader. The soldiers then marched to a recently erected flagpole near the platform, and began raising a banner that depicted the colorful shields of twenty of the major tribes arranged in a pattern on a field of green, while Yank Rogers, who had been unable to create a national anthem on two days' notice, played a military march on his ancient bugle. Roosevelt stood at attention and saluted, Boyes and the chiefs followed suit, and the reporters, politicians, and dignitaries were quick to rise to their feet as well.

When the flag had been raised and the rope secured at the base of the flagpole, Roosevelt faced the crowd once more.

"I have been selected, by the unanimous consent of the tribes that are represented here today, to draft and implement a democratic constitution for the Congo Free State. During this time I shall hold the office of Chief Administrator, an office that will be abolished when the first national election is held one year from today. At that time all the people of the Congo Free State, regardless of race or gender, will choose their own

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president and legislature, and their destiny will finally be in their own hands."

He stared out at the audience.

"I thank you for your attendance at this historic ceremony. Lunch will be provided for everyone on the lawn, and I will be available for interviews throughout the afternoon."

He climbed down from the platform to one last round of applause, finally allowed them a look at the famed Roosevelt grin, waited for Boyes to join him, and disappeared into the interior of the state house.

"How was I, John?" he asked anxiously.

"I thought you were excellent, Mr. President," answered Boyes truthfully.

"Mr. Chief Administrator, you mean," Roosevelt corrected him. Suddenly he smiled. "Although by this time you certainly know me well enough to call me Teddy. Everyone else does."

"I think I prefer Mr. President," replied Boyes. "I'm used to it."

Roosevelt shrugged, then looked out the window as the crowd began lining up at the long buffet tables.

"They don't think I can do it, do they, John?"

"No, sir, they don't," answered Boyes honestly.

"Well, they'd be correct if I applied their outmoded methods," said Roosevelt. He drew himself up to his full height. "However, this is a new century. We have new technologies, new methods, and new outlooks."

"But this is an old country," said Boyes.

"What is that supposed to mean, John?"

"Just that it might not be ready for your new approach, Mr. President."

"You saw the chiefs out there, John," said Roosevelt. "They're my strongest supporters."

"It's in their best interest to be," said Boyes. "After all, you've promised them the moon."

"And I'll deliver it," said Roosevelt resolutely.

X.

Boyes walked into the state house and was ushered into Roosevelt's office.

"Where have you been, John?" asked Roosevelt. "I expected you back three days ago."

"It took a little longer than I thought to set up my trading company," answered Boyes. "But if your laborers ever arrive, at least they won't starve to death. I've got commitments for flour and meat."

"What are you trading for them?"

"Iodine," answered Boyes. "That's what took me so long. My shipment was late arriving from Nairobi."

"Iodine?" repeated Roosevelt, curious.

Boyes smiled. "There are some infections even a witch doctor can't

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cure." He sat down in a leather chair opposite Roosevelt's desk, looking quite pleased with himself. "An ounce of iodine for thirty pounds of flour or one hundred pounds of meat."

"That's immoral, John. Those people *need* that medication."

"Our people will need that food," answered Boyes.

"My hospitals will put you out of business," said Roosevelt sternly. "We will never withhold treatment despite a patient's inability to pay for it."

"When you build your hospitals, I'll find something else to trade them," said Boyes with a shrug. He decided to change the subject. "I hear you held your first local election while I was gone. How did it go?"

"I would call it a limited success."

"Oh?"

"It was a trial run, so to speak," said Roosevelt. "We selected a district at random and tried to show them how an election works." He paused. "We had a turnout of almost ninety percent, which is certainly very promising."

"Let me guess about the unpromising part," said Boyes. "Your candidates didn't get a single crossover vote."

Roosevelt nodded his head grimly. "The vote went one hundred percent along tribal lines."

"I hope you're not surprised."

"No, but I *am* disappointed." Roosevelt sighed. "I'll simply have to keep explaining to them that they are supposed to vote on the issues and not the tribal connections until they finally understand the principle involved."

For the first time since they had met, Boyes felt sorry for the American.

"Not guilty?" repeated Roosevelt. "How in the name of pluperfect hell could they come in with a verdict of not guilty?"

He had turned the local theater into a court room, and had spent the better part of a week instructing the members of the Luba and Zande tribes in the intricacies of the jury system. Then he himself had acted as the presiding judge at the Congo Free State's very first trial by jury, and he was now in his makeshift chambers, barely able to control his fury.

"It was a unanimous decision," said Charlie Ross, who had acted as bailiff.

"I know it was a unanimous decision, Mr. Ross!" thundered Roosevelt. "What I don't know is how, in the face of all the evidence, they could come up with it?"

"Why don't you ask them?" suggested Ross.

"By God, that's exactly what I'll do!" said Roosevelt. "Bring them in here, one at a time."

Ross left the room for about five minutes, during which time Roosevelt tried unsuccessfully to compose himself.

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"Sir," said Ross, re-entering in the company of a tall, slender black man, "this is Tambika, one of the jurors."

"Thank you, Mr. Ross," said Roosevelt. He turned to the African. "Mr. Tambika," he said in heavily accented Swahili, "I wonder if you could explain your decision to me."

"Explain it, King Teddy?" asked Tambika, bewildered.

"Please call me Mr. Chief Administrator," said Roosevelt uncomfortably. He paused. "The man, Toma, was accused of stealing six cows. Four eyewitnesses claimed to see him driving the cows back toward his own home, and Mr. Kalimi showed you a bill of sale he received when he purchased the cows from Toma. There is no question that the cows bore the mark, or brand, of the plaintiff, Mr. Salamaki. Can you please tell me why you found him innocent?"

"Ah, now I understand," said Tambika with a large smile. "Toma owes me money. How can he pay me if he is in jail?"

"But he broke the law."

"True," agreed Tambika.

"Then you must find him guilty."

"But if I had found him guilty, he would never be able to pay me what he owes me," protested Tambika. "That is not justice, King Teddy."

Roosevelt argued with Tambika for another few minutes, then dismissed him and had Ross bring in the next juror, an old man named Begoni. After reciting the evidence again, he put the question to the old man.

"It is very clear," answered Begoni. "Toma is a Luba, as am I. Salamaki is a Zande. It is impossible for the Luba to commit a crime against the Zande."

"But that is precisely what he did, Mr. Begoni," said Roosevelt.

The old man shook his head. "The Zande have been stealing our cattle and our women since God created the world. It is our right to steal them back."

"The law says otherwise," Roosevelt pointed out.

"Whose law?" asked the old man, staring at him with no show of fear or awe. "Yours or God's?"

"If Mr. Toma were a Zande, would you have found him guilty?"

"Certainly," answered Begoni, as if the question were too ridiculous to consider.

"If Mr. Toma were a Zande and you knew for a fact that he had *not* stolen the cattle, would you have found him innocent?" asked Roosevelt.

"No."

"Why?" asked Roosevelt in exasperation.

"There are too many Zande in the world."

"That will be all, Mr. Begoni."

"Thank you, Mr. Teddy," said the old man, walking to the door. He paused for a moment just before leaving. "I like jury trials," he announced. "It saves much bloodshed."

"I can't believe it!" said Roosevelt, getting to his feet and stalking back

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and forth across the room after the door had closed behind Begoni. "I spent an entire week with these people, explaining how the system works!"

"Are you ready for the next one, sir?" asked Ross.

"No!" snapped Roosevelt. "I already know what he'll say. Toma's a tribal brother. Toma can't pay the bride price for his daughter if we throw him in jail. If a document, such as a bill of sale, implicates a Luba, then it must have been cursed by a Zande witch doctor and cannot be believed." Roosevelt turned to Ross. "What is the matter with these people, Charlie? Don't they understand what I'm trying to do for them?"

"They have their own system of justice, Mr. President," answered Ross gently.

"I've seen that system in action," said Roosevelt contemptuously. "A witch doctor touches a hot iron to the accused's tongue. If he cries out, he's guilty; if he doesn't, he's innocent. What kind of system is that, I ask you?"

"One they believe in," said Ross.

"Well, that's that," said Roosevelt grimly, after opening the weekly mail. "Morgan isn't interested in investing in a railroad."

"Is there anyone else you can ask?" inquired Boyes.

"Bill Taft is mismanaging the economy. I have a feeling that the people who can afford to invest are feeling exceptionally conservative this year."

Nevertheless, he wrote another thirty letters that afternoon, each soliciting funds, and mailed them the next morning. He expressed great confidence that the money would soon be forthcoming, but he began making contingency plans for the day, not far off, when construction of the Trans-Congo Railway would be forced to come to a halt.

"What do you mean, you have no more supplies?" demanded Roosevelt. "You had ample track for another five miles, Mr. Brody."

Brody, a burly American, stood uncomfortably before Roosevelt's desk, fidgeting with his pith helmet, which he held awkwardly in his huge hands.

"Yes, we did, Mr. Roosevelt."

"Well?"

"It's the natives, sir," said Brody. "They keep stealing it."

"Rubbish! What possible use could they have for steel track?"

"You wouldn't believe the uses they put it to, sir," answered Brody. "They use it to support their huts, and to make pens for their goats and cattle, and they melt it down for spearheads."

"Well, then, take it back."

"We were expressly instructed not to harm any of the natives, sir, and whenever we've tried to retrieve our tracks we've been threatened with spears, and occasionally even guns. If we can't take them back by force, they're going to stay right where they are until they rust."

"Who's the headman in your area, Mr. Brody?" asked Roosevelt.

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"A Mangbetu named Matapoli."

"I know him personally," said Roosevelt, his expression brightening. "Bring him here and perhaps we can get this situation resolved."

"That could take six weeks, sir—and that's assuming he'll come with me."

Roosevelt shook his head. "That won't do, Mr. Brody. I can't pay your men to sit on their hands for six weeks." He paused, then nodded to himself, his decision made. "I'll return with you. It's time I got out among the people again, anyway."

He summoned Yank Rogers while Brody was getting lunch at a small restaurant down the street.

"What can I do for you, Teddy?" asked the American.

"I'm going to have to go to Mangbetu country, Yank," answered Roosevelt. "I want you and Mr. Buckley to remain in Stanleyville and keep an eye on things here while I'm gone."

"What about Boyes?" asked Rogers. "Isn't that his job?"

"John will be accompanying me," answered Roosevelt. "The Mangbetu seem to be very fond of him."

"They're equally fond of you, Teddy."

"I enjoy his company," said Roosevelt. He smiled wryly. "I'll also find it comforting to know that the state house hasn't been sold to the highest bidder in my absence."

"John," remarked Roosevelt, as he and Boyes sat beside a campfire, "have you noticed that we haven't seen any sign of elephants in more than a week now?"

The horses started whinnying as the wind brought the scent of lion and hyena to them.

"Perhaps they've migrated to the west," said Boyes.

"Come on, John," said Roosevelt. "I'm not as old a hand at this as you are, but I know when an area's been shot out."

"We've shipped a lot of ivory to Mombasa and Zanzibar during the past year," said Boyes.

"I didn't mind our men making a little money on the side, John, but I won't have them decimating the herds."

"They've been more than a year without a paycheck," answered Boyes seriously. "If you tell them they have to stop hunting ivory, I doubt that more than a dozen of them will stay in the Congo."

"Then we'll have to make do without their services," said Roosevelt. "The elephants belong to the people of the Congo Free State now. We've got to start a game department and charge for hunting licenses while there's still something left to hunt."

"If you say so," replied Boyes.

Roosevelt stared long and hard at him. "Will *you* be one of the ones who leaves, John?"

Boyes shook his head. "I'm the one who talked you into this in the first place, Mr. President," he answered. "I'll stay as long as you do." He

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paused thoughtfully. "I've made more than my share of money off the ivory anyway, and I suppose we really ought to stop while there are still some elephants left. I was just pointing out the consequences of abolishing poaching."

"Then start passing the word as soon as we get back," said Roosevelt. Suddenly he frowned. "That's funny."

"What is, sir?"

"I felt very dizzy for just a moment there." He shrugged. "I'm sure it will pass."

But it didn't, and that night the ex-president came down with malaria. Boyes tended to him and nursed him back to health, but another week had been wasted, and Roosevelt had the distinct feeling that he didn't have too many of them left to put the country on the right track.

"Ah, my friend Johnny—and King Teddy!" Matapoli greeted them with a huge smile of welcome. "You honor my village with your presence."

"Your village has changed since the last time we were here," noted Boyes wryly.

Matapoli pointed proudly to the five railroad coach cars that his men had dragged miles through the bush over a period of months, and which now housed his immediate family and the families of four of the tribe's elders.

"Oh, yes," he said happily. "King Teddy promised us democracy, and he kept his promise." He pointed to one of the cars. "*My* democracy is the finest of all. Come join me inside it."

Roosevelt and Boyes exchanged ironic glances and followed Matapoli into the coach car, which was filled with some twenty or so of his children.

"King Teddy has returned!" enthused the Mangbetu chief. "We must have a hunt in the forest and have a feast in your honor."

"That's very thoughtful of you, Matapoli," said Roosevelt. "But it has been many months since we last saw each other. Let us talk together first."

"Yes, that would be very good," agreed Matapoli, puffing out his chest as the children recognized the two visitors and raced off to inform the rest of the village.

"Just how many children do you have?" asked Roosevelt.

Matapoli paused in thought for a moment. "Ten, and ten more, and then seven," he answered.

"And how many wives?"

"Five."

The puritanical American tried without success to hide his disapproval. "That's a very large family, Matapoli."

"Should be more, should be more," admitted the Mangbetu. "But it took many months to bring the democracies here."

"Had you left them on the track, you could have traveled all across the country with them," Boyes pointed out.

Matapoli threw back his head and laughed. "Why should I want to go

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to Lulua or Bwaka country?" he asked. "They would just kill me and take my democracies for themselves."

"Please try to understand, Matapoli," said Roosevelt. "There are no longer Mangbetu or Lulua or Bwaka countries. There is just the Congo Free State, and you all live in it."

"You are king of all the countries, King Teddy," answered Matapoli. "You need have no fear. If the Bwaka say that you are not, then we shall kill them."

Roosevelt spent the next ten minutes trying to explain the Congo Free State to Matapoli, who was no closer to comprehending it at the end of the discussion than at the beginning.

"All right," said the American with a sigh of resignation. "Let's get back to talking about the trains."

"Trains?" repeated Matapoli.

"The democracies, and the steel logs they rolled upon," interjected Boyes.

"Another gift from King Teddy," said Matapoli enthusiastically. "No longer can the leopards and the hyenas break through the thorns and kill my cattle. Now I use the metal thorns, and my animals are safe."

"The metal thorns were built so that you and the other Mangbetu could travel many miles without having to walk," said Roosevelt.

"Why should we wish to go many miles?" asked Matapoli, honestly puzzled. "The river runs beside the village, and the forest and its game are just a short walk away."

"You might wish to visit another tribe."

Matapoli smiled. "How could we sneak up on our enemies in the democracies? They are too large, and they would make too much noise when they rolled upon the iron thorns." He shook his head. "No, King Teddy, they are much better right here, where we can put them to use."

Long after the feast was over and Roosevelt and Boyes were riding their horses back toward Stanleyville, Roosevelt, who had been replaying the frustrting day over and over in his mind, finally sighed and muttered: "By God, that probably *is* the best use they could have been put to!"

Boyes found the remark highly amusing, and burst into laughter. A moment later Roosevelt joined him with a hearty laugh of his own, and that was the official end of the Trans-Congo Railway.

They came to a newly paved road when they were fifteen miles out of Stanleyville and, glad to finally be free of the bush and the forest, they veered their mounts onto it. As they continued their journey, they passed dozens of men and women walking alongside the road.

"Why don't they walk *on* it, John?" asked Roosevelt curiously. "There can't be fifteen trucks in the whole of the Congo. Until we import some more, we might as well put the roads to some use."

"They're barefoot," Boyes pointed out.

"So what? The road is a lot smoother than the rocks alongside it."

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"It's also a lot hotter," answered Boyes. "By high noon you could fry an egg on it."

"You mean we've spent a million dollars on roads for which there not only aren't any cars and trucks, but that the people can't even walk on?"

"This isn't America, sir."

"A point that is being driven home daily," muttered Roosevelt wearily.

XI.

Roosevelt sat at his desk, staring at a number of letters and documents that lay stacked neatly in front of him. To his left was a photograph of Edith and his children, to his right a picture of himself delivering a State of the Union address to the United States Congress, and behind him, on an ornate brass stand, was the flag of the Congo Free State.

Finally, with a sigh, he opened the final letter, read it quickly, and, frowning, placed it atop the stack.

"Bad news, Mr. President?" asked Boyes, who was sitting in the leather chair on the opposite side of the desk.

"No worse than the rest of them," answered Roosevelt. "That was from Mr. Bennigan, our chief engineer on the Stanley Falls Bridge. He sends his regrets, but his men haven't been paid in three weeks, and he's going to have to pull out." He stared at the letter. "There's no postmark, of course, but I would guess that it took at least two weeks to get here."

"We didn't need him anyway," said Boyes, dismissing the matter with a shrug. "What's the sense of building a bridge over the falls if we don't have any trains or cars?"

"Because someday we'll have them, John, and when we do, they're going to need roads and tracks and bridges."

"When that happy day arrives, I'm sure we'll have enough money to complete work on the bridge," replied Boyes.

Roosevelt sighed. "It's not as devastating a blow as losing the teachers. How many of them have left?"

"Just about all."

"Damn!" muttered Roosevelt. "How can we educate the populace if there's no one to teach them?"

"With all due respect, sir, they don't need Western educations," said Boyes. "You're trying to turn them into Americans, and they're not. Reading and writing are no more important to them than railroads are."

Roosevelt stared at him for a long moment. "What do *you* think is important to them, John?"

"You're talking about a primitive society," answered Boyes. "They need to learn crop rotation and hygiene and basic medicine far more than they need roads that they'll never use and railroad cars that they think are simply huts on wheels."

"You're wrong, John," said Roosevelt adamantly. "A little black African baby is no different than a little black American baby—or a little

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white American baby, for that matter. If we can get them young enough, and educate them thoroughly enough . . ."

"I don't like to contradict you, sir," interrupted Boyes, "but you're wrong. What's the point of having ten thousand college graduates if they all have to go home to their huts every night because there aren't two hundred jobs for educated men in the whole country? If you want to have a revolution on your hands, raise their expectations, prepare them to live and function in London or New York—and then make them stay in the Congo."

Roosevelt shook his head vigorously. "If we did things your way, these people would stay in ignorance and poverty forever. I told you when we began this enterprise that I wasn't coming here to turn the Congo into my private hunting preserve." He paused. "I haven't found the key yet, but if anyone can bring the Congo into the twentieth century, I can."

"Has it occurred to you that perhaps no one can?" suggested Boyes gently.

"Not for a moment," responded Roosevelt firmly.

"I'll stay as long as you do, sir," said Boyes. "You know that. But if you don't come up with some answers pretty soon, we may be the last two white men in this country, except for the missionaries and some of the Belgian planters who stayed behind. Almost half our original party has already left."

"They were just here for ivory or adventure," said Roosevelt dismissively. "We need people who care about this country more than we need people who are here merely to plunder it." Suddenly he stared out the window at some fixed point in space.

"Are you all right, sir?" asked Boyes after Roosevelt had remained motionless for almost a minute.

"Never better," answered the American suddenly. "You know, John, I see now that I've been going about this the wrong way. No one cares as much for the future of the Congo as the people themselves. I was wrong to try to bring in help from outside; in the long run, any progress we make here will be much more meaningful if it's accomplished by our own efforts."

"Ours?" repeated Boyes, puzzled. "You mean yours and mine?"

"I mean the citizens of the Congo Free State," answered Roosevelt. "I've been telling you and the engineers and the teachers and the missionaries what they need. I think it's about time I told the people and rallied them to their own cause."

"We've already promised them democracy," said Boyes. "And there's at least one Mangbetu village that will swear we delivered it to them," he added with a smile.

"Those were politicians' promises, designed to get our foot in the door," said Roosevelt. "Democracy may be a right, but it isn't a gift. It requires effort and sacrifice. They've got to understand that."

"First they've got to understand what democracy means."

"They will, once I've explained it to them," answered Roosevelt.

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"You mean in person?" asked Boyes.

"That's right," said Roosevelt. "I'll start in the eastern section of the country, now that my Swahili has become fluent, and as I move west I'll use translators. But I'm going to go out among the people myself. I'm certainly not doing any good sitting here in Stanleyville; it's time to go out on the stump and get my message across to the only people who really need to understand it." He paused. "I'd love to have your company, John, but there are so few of us left that I think it would be better for you to remain here and keep an eye on things."

"Whatever you say, Mr. President," replied Boyes. "When will you leave?"

"Tomorrow," said Roosevelt. He paused. "No. This afternoon. There's nothing more important to do, and we've no time to waste."

He went among the people for five weeks, and everywhere he stopped, the drums had anticipated his arrival and the tribes flocked to see him.

He took his time, avoided any hint of jingoism, and carefully explained the principles of democracy to them. He pointed out the necessity of education, the importance of modern farming methods, the need to end all forms of tribalism, and the advantages of a monied economy. At the end of each "town meeting," as he called them, he held a prolonged question-and-answer session, and then he moved on to the next major village and repeated the entire procedure again.

During the morning of his thirty-sixth day on the stump, he was joined by Yank Rogers, who rode down from Stanleyville to see him.

"Hello, Yank!" cried Roosevelt enthusiastically as he saw the American riding up to his tent, which had been pitched just outside of a Lulua village.

"Hi, Teddy," said Rogers, pulling up his horse and dismounting. "You're looking good. Getting out in the bush seems to agree with you."

"I feel as fit as a bull moose," replied Roosevelt with a smile. "How's John doing?"

"Getting rich, as usual," said Rogers, not without a hint of admiration for the enterprising Yorkshireman. "I thought he was going to be stuck with about a million pounds of flour when all the construction people pulled out, but he heard that there was a famine in Portugese Angola, so he traded the flour for ivory, and then had Buckley and the Brittlebanks brothers cart it to Mombasa when they decided to call it quits, in exchange for half the profits."

"That sounds like John, all right," agreed Roosevelt. "I'm sorry to hear that we've lost Buckley and the others, though."

Rogers shrugged. "They're just Brits. What the hell do they know about democracy? They'd slit your throat in two seconds flat if someone told them that it would get 'em an audience with the king." He paused. "All except Boyes, anyway. He'd find some way to put the king on display and charge money for it."

Roosevelt chuckled heartily. "You know, I do believe you're right."

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"So much for Mr. Boyes," said Rogers, "How's your campaign going?"

"Just bully," answered Roosevelt. "The response has been wildly enthusiastic." He paused. "I'm surprised news of it hasn't reached you."

"How could it?" asked Rogers. "There aren't any radios or newspapers—and even if there were, these people speak three hundred different languages and none of 'em can read or write."

"Still," said Roosevelt, "I've made a start."

"I don't doubt it, sir."

"I'm drawing almost five hundred natives a day," continued Roosevelt. "That's more than 15,000 converts in just over a month."

"If they stay converted."

"They will."

"Just another six million to go," said Rogers with a chuckle.

"I'm sure they're passing the word."

"To their fellow tribesmen, maybe," answered Rogers. "I wouldn't bet on their talking to anyone else."

"You sound like a pessimist, Yank," said Roosevelt.

"Pessimism and realism are next-door neighbors on this continent, Teddy," said Rogers.

"And yet you stay," noted Roosevelt.

Rogers smiled. "I figure if anyone can whip this country into shape, it's you—and if you do, I want to be able to laugh at all those Brits who gave up and left."

"Well, stick around," said Roosevelt. "I'm just getting warmed up."

"Sounds like fun," said Rogers. "I haven't heard you rile up a crowd since you ran for Governor of New York. I was in Africa before you ran for president." Suddenly he reached into his shirt pocket and withdrew an envelope. "I almost forgot why I rode all this way," he said, handing it to Roosevelt.

"What is it?"

"A letter from Boyes," answered Rogers. "He said to deliver it to you personally."

Roosevelt opened the letter, read it twice, then crumpled it into a ball and stuffed it into a pocket.

"I'm afraid you're not going to be able to hear me giving any speeches this week, Yank," he announced. "I've got to return to Stanleyville."

"Something wrong?"

Roosevelt nodded. "It seems that Billy Pickering found four Belgian soldiers in a remote area in the southwest, men who had never received word that the Belgians had withdrawn from the Congo, and shot them dead."

"You mean he had me ride all the way here just for that?" demanded Rogers.

"It's a matter of vital importance, Yank."

"What's so important about four dead men?" asked Rogers. "Life is cheap in Africa."

"The Belgian government is demanding reparation."

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"Yeah, I see where *that* can make it a little more expensive," admitted Rogers.

XII.

"I wasn't sure how you wanted to handle it," Boyes said, staring across the desk at Roosevelt, who had just returned to Stanleyville less than an hour ago.

"You were right to summon me, John."

"So far they haven't made any threats, but we're receiving diplomatic communiqués every other day."

"What's the gist of them?"

"Reparation, as I mentioned in my note to you."

Roosevelt shook his head. "They know we don't have any money," he answered. "They want something else."

"Pickering's head on a platter, I should think," suggested Boyes.

"They don't care any more about their soldiers than *he* did," said Roosevelt. "Let me see those communiqués."

Boyes handed over a sheaf of papers, and Roosevelt spent the next few minutes reading through them.

"Well?" asked Boyes when the American had set the papers down.

"I don't have sufficient information," answered Roosevelt. "Have they gone to the world press with this?"

"If they have, we won't know it for months," said Boyes. "The most recent paper I've seen is a ten-week-old copy of the *East African Standard*." He paused. "Why would going to the press make a difference?"

"Because if they've gone public, then they're positioning themselves to try to take the Congo back from us, by proving that we can't protect European nationals."

"But they weren't nationals," said Boyes. "They were soldiers."

"That just makes our position worse," replied Roosevelt. "If we can't protect a group of armed men who know the Congo, how can we protect anyone else?"

"Then what do you want to do about Pickering?" inquired Boyes.

"Where is he now?"

"In the jail at Leopoldville. Charlie Ross brought him in dead drunk, and locked him away."

"The proper decision," said Roosevelt, nodding approvingly. "I must remember to commend him for it."

"I'm afraid you won't be able to, Mr. President," said Boyes. "He's back in Kenya."

"Charlie?" said Roosevelt, surprised. "I'd have thought he'd be just about the last one to leave."

Boyes paused and stared uncomfortably across the desk at Roosevelt.

"Except for Yank Rogers and me, he was."

"They're *all* gone?"

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"Yes, sir." Boyes cleared his throat and continued: "You did your best, sir, but everything's coming unraveled. Most of them stuck it out for better than two years, but we always knew that sooner or later they'd leave. They're not bureaucrats and administrators, they're hunters and adventurers."

"I know, John," said Roosevelt, suddenly feeling his years. "And I don't hold it against them. They helped us more than we had any right to expect." He paused and sighed deeply. "I had rather hoped we'd have a bureaucracy in place by this time."

"I know, sir."

"I wonder if it would have done much good," Roosevelt mused aloud. He looked across at Boyes. "That trip I just returned from—I wasted my time, didn't I?"

"Yes, sir, you did."

"We needed more teachers," said Roosevelt. "One man can't educate them overnight. We needed more teachers, and more money, and more time."

Boyes shook his head. "You needed a different country, Mr. President."

"Let's have no more talk about the inferiority of the African race, John," said Roosevelt. "I'm not up to it today."

"I've never said they were inferior, Mr. President," said Boyes, surprised.

"Certainly you have, John—and frequently, too."

"That's not so, sir," insisted Boyes. "No matter what you may think, I have no contempt or hatred for the Africans—which is why I've always been able to function in their countries." He paused. "I understand them—as much as any white man can. They're not inferior, but they *are* different. The things they care about seem almost meaningless to us—and because of that, you simply can't turn them into Americans in two short years, or even twenty."

"We did it in America," said Roosevelt stubbornly.

"That's because your blacks were being assimilated into a dominant society that had already existed and was in possession of the country," answered Boyes. "The whites here are just passing through, and the Africans know it, even if the whites don't. They may have to put up with us temporarily, but we won't have any lasting effect on their culture." He paused as Roosevelt considered his words, then continued: "When all is said and done, it's their country and their continent, and one of these days they're going to throw us all out. But what follows us won't look anything like a Western society; it'll be an African society, shaped by and for the Africans." He smiled wryly. "I wish them well, but personally I wouldn't care to be part of it."

"I've said it before, John: You're a very interesting man," said Roosevelt, a strange expression on his face. "Please continue."

"Continue?" repeated Boyes, puzzled.

"Tell me why you wouldn't care to be part of an African nation based on African principles and beliefs."

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"For the same reason that they have no desire to become Americans or Europeans, once we stop bribing them to pretend otherwise," answered Boyes. "Their culture is alien to my beliefs." He paused. "Democracy, and the Christian virtues, and the joys of literature, and a reverence for life, all these things work for you, sir, because you have a deep and abiding belief in them. They won't work here because the people of the Congo *don't* believe in them. They believe in witch doctors, and tribalism, and polygamy, and rituals that seem barbaric to me even after a quarter century of being exposed to them. We couldn't adapt to their beliefs any more than they can adapt to ours."

"Go on, John," said Roosevelt, his enthusiasm mounting.

Boyes stared at him curiously. "You've got that look about you, Mr. President."

"What look?"

"The same one I saw that first night we met in the Lado Enclave," said Boyes.

"How would you describe it?" asked Roosevelt, amused.

"I'd call it the look of a crusader."

Roosevelt chuckled with delight. "You're a very perceptive man, John," he said. "By God, I wish I were a drinking man! I'd celebrate with a drink right now!"

"I'll be happy to have two drinks, one for each of us, if you'll tell me what you're so excited about, Mr. President," said Boyes.

"I finally understand what I've been doing wrong," said Roosevelt.

"And what is that, sir?" asked Boyes cautiously.

"Everything!" said Roosevelt with a hearty laugh. "Lord knows I've had enough discussions on the subject with you and the others, but I've always proceeded on the assumption that I was part of the solution. Well, I'm not." He paused, delighted with his sudden insight. "I'm part of the problem! So are you, John. So are the British and the French and the Portugese and the Belgians and everyone else who has tried to impose their culture on this continent. That's what you and Mickey Norton and Charlie Ross and all the others have been telling me, but none of you could properly articulate your position or carry it through to its logical conclusion." He paused again, barely able to sit still. "*Now* I finally see what we have to do, John!"

"Are you suggesting we leave?" asked Boyes.

Roosevelt shook his head. "It's not that simple, John. Eventually we'll have to, but if we leave now, the Belgians will just move back in and nothing will have changed. It's our duty—our holy mission, if you will—to make sure that doesn't happen, and that the Congo is allowed to develop free from all external influences, including ours."

"That's a mighty tall order, sir," said Boyes. "For instance, what will you do about the missionaries?"

"If they've made converts, they're here at the will of the people, and they've become part of the process," answered Roosevelt after some consideration. "If they haven't, eventually they'll give up and go home."

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"All right," said Boyes. "Then what about—?"

"All in good time, John," interrupted Roosevelt. "We'll have to work out thousands of details, but I feel in my bones that after two years of false starts, we're finally on the proper course." He paused thoughtfully. "Our first problem is what to do with Billy Pickering."

"If you're worried about the Belgians, we can't give him a trial by jury," said Boyes. "These people have hated the Belgians for decades. They'll find him innocent of anything more serious than eliminating vermin, and probably vote him into the presidency."

"No, we can't have a jury trial," agreed Roosevelt. "But not for the reason you suggest."

"Oh?"

"We can't have it because it's a Western institution, and that's what we're going to eradicate—unless and until it evolves naturally."

"Then do you want to execute him?" asked Boyes. "That might satisfy the Belgians."

Roosevelt shook his head vigorously. "We're not in the business of satisfying the Belgians, John." He paused thoughtfully. "Have Yank Rogers escort him to the nearest border and tell him never to return to the Congo. If the Belgians want him, let *them* get him."

Having summarily eliminated the system of justice that he had imposed on the country, Roosevelt spent the remainder of the week eagerly dismantling the rest of the democracy that he had brought to the Congo.

XIII.

Roosevelt was sitting beneath the shade of an ancient baobob tree, composing his weekly letter to Edith. It had been almost three weeks since he had embraced his new vision for the future of the Congo, and he was discussing it enthusiastically, in between queries about Kermit, Quentin, Alice, and the other children.

Boyes sat some distance away, engrossed in Frederick Selous' latest memoirs. The book had been personally inscribed to Roosevelt, whose safari Selous had arranged some three years earlier.

Suddenly Yank Rogers walked up the broad lawn of the state house and approached Roosevelt.

"What is it, Yank?"

"Company," he said with a contemptuous expression on his face.

"Oh?"

"Our old pal, Silva," said Rogers. "You want me to bring him to your office?"

Roosevelt shook his head. "It's too beautiful a day to go inside, Yank. I'll talk to him right here."

Rogers shrugged, walked around to the front of the building, and returned a moment later with Gerard Silva.

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"Hello, Mr. Silva," said Roosevelt, getting to his feet and extending his hand.

"*Ambassador* Silva," replied Silva, shaking his hand briefly.

"I wasn't aware that Belgium had sent an Ambassador to the Congo Free State."

"My official title is Ambassador-at-Large," said Silva.

"Well, you seem to have come a long way since you were an Assistant Governor of an unprofitable colony," said Roosevelt easily.

"And *you* have come an equally long way since you promised to turn the Congo into a second America," answered Silva coldly. "All of it downhill."

"It's all a matter of perspective," said Roosevelt.

There was an uneasy silence.

"I have come to Stanleyville for two reasons, Mr. Roosevelt," said Silva at last.

"I was certain that you wouldn't come all this way without a reason," replied Roosevelt.

"First, I have come to inquire about the man, Pickering."

"Mr. Pickering was deported as an undesirable some nineteen days ago," answered Roosevelt promptly.

"Deported?" demanded Silva. "He killed four Belgian soldiers!"

"That was hearsay evidence, Mr. Silva," responded Roosevelt. "We could find no eyewitnesses to confirm it."

"Pickering himself admitted it!"

"That was why he was deported," said Roosevelt. "Though there was insufficient evidence to convict him, we felt that there was every possibility that he was telling the truth. This made him an undesirable alien, and he was escorted to the border and told never to return."

"You let him go!"

"We deported him."

"This is totally unacceptable."

"We are a free and independent nation, Mr. Silva," said Roosevelt, a hint of anger in his high-pitched voice. "Are you presuming to tell us how to run our internal affairs?"

"I am telling you that this action is totally unacceptable to the government of Belgium," said Silva harshly.

"Then should Mr. Pickering ever confess to committing a murder within the borders of Belgium, I am sure that your government will deal with it in a manner that is more acceptable to you." Roosevelt paused, as Boyes tried not to laugh aloud. "You had a second reason for coming to Stanleyville, I believe?"

Silva nodded. "Yes, I have, Mr. Roosevelt. I bring an offer from my government."

"The same government that is furious with me for deporting Mr. Pickering?" said Roosevelt. "Well, by all means, let me hear it."

"Your experiment has been a dismal failure, Mr. Roosevelt," said Silva, taking an inordinate amount of pleasure in each word he uttered. "Your

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treasury is bankrupt, your railroads and highways will never be completed, your bridges and canals do not exist. You have failed to hold the national election that was promised to the international community. Even the small handful of men who accompanied you at the onset of this disastrous misadventure have deserted you." Silva paused and smiled. "You must admit that you are in an unenviable position, Mr. Roosevelt."

"Get to the point, Mr. Silva."

"The government of Belgium is willing to put our differences behind us."

"How considerate of them," remarked Roosevelt dryly.

"If you will publicly request our assistance," continued Silva, "we would be willing to once again assume the responsibility of governing the Congo." He smiled again. "You really have no choice, Mr. Roosevelt. With every day that passes, the Congo retreats further and further into insolvency and barbarism."

Roosevelt laughed harshly. "Your government has a truly remarkable sense of humor, Mr. Silva."

"Are you rejecting our offer?"

"Of course I am," said Roosevelt. "And you're lucky I don't pick you up by the scruff of the neck and throw you clear back to Brussels."

"Need I point out that should my government decide that the Congo's vital interests require our presence, you have no standing army that can prevent our doing what must be done?"

Roosevelt glanced at his wristwatch. "Mr. Silva," he said, "I'm going to give you exactly sixty seconds to say good-bye and take your leave of us. If you're still here at that time, I'm going to have Mr. Boyes escort you to the nearest form of transportation available and point you toward Belgium."

"That is your final word?" demanded Silva, his face flushing beneath his deep tan.

"My final word is for King Albert," said Roosevelt heatedly. "But since I am a Christian and a gentleman, I can't utter it. Now get out of my sight."

Silva glared at him, then turned on his heel and left.

Roosevelt turned to Boyes, who was still sitting in his chair, book in hand. "You heard?" he asked.

"Every word of it." Boyes paused and smiled. "I wish he'd have stayed another forty seconds." He got to his feet and approached Roosevelt. "What do you plan to do about the Belgians?"

"We certainly can't allow them back into the country, that much is clear," said Roosevelt.

"How do you propose to stop them?"

Roosevelt lowered his head in thought for a moment, then looked up. "There's only one way, John."

"Raise an army?"

Roosevelt smiled and shook his head. "What would we pay them with?" He paused. "Besides, we don't want a war. We just want to make sure

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that the Congo is allowed to develop in its own way, free from all outside influences."

"What do you plan to do?" asked Boyes.

"I'm going to return to America and run for the Presidency again," announced Roosevelt. "Bill Taft is a fat fool, and I made a mistake by turning the country over to him. I'll run on a platform of making the Congo a United States Protectorate. *That* ought to make the Belgians think twice before trying to march in here again!" He nodded his head vigorously. "That's what I'll have to do, if these people are ever to develop their own culture in their own way." His eyes reflected his eagerness. "In fact, I'll leave this afternoon! I'll take Yank with me; I'm sure I can find a place for him in Washington."

"You realize what will happen if you lose?" said Boyes. "The Belgians will march in here five minutes later."

"Then there's no time to waste, is there?" said Roosevelt. "You're welcome to come along, John."

Boyes shook his head. "Thank you for the offer, Mr. President, but there's still a few shillings to be made here in Africa." He paused. "I'll stay in Stanleyville until you return, or until I hear that you've lost the election."

"A little more optimism, John," said Roosevelt with a grin. "The word 'lose' is not in our lexicon."

Boyes stared at him for a long moment. "You mean it, don't you?" he said at last, as the fact of it finally hit home. "You're really going to run for the presidency again."

"Of course I mean it."

"Don't you ever get tired of challenges?" asked Boyes.

"Do you ever get tired of breathing?" replied Roosevelt, his face aglow as he considered the future and began enumerating the obstacles he faced. "First the election, then Protectorate status for the Congo, and then we'll see just what direction its social evolution takes." He paused. "This is a wonderful experiment we're embarking upon, John."

"It'll be interesting," commented Boyes.

"More than that," said Roosevelt enthusiastically. "It'll be bully—just bully!"

The date was April 17, 1912.

XIV.

After returning home from the Congo, Theodore Roosevelt was denied the Republican nomination for President in 1912. Undaunted, he formed the Bull Moose party, ran as its presidential candidate, and was believed to be ahead in the polls when he was shot in the chest by a fanatic named John Chrank on October 14. Although he recovered from the wound, he was physically unable to campaign further and lost the election to Wood-

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row Wilson, though finishing well ahead of the seated Republican President, William Howard Taft. He lost what remained of his health in 1914 while exploring and mapping the River of Doubt (later renamed the Rio Teodoro) at the behest of the Brazilian government, and never returned to Africa. He died at his home in Sagamore Hill, New York, on January 6, 1919.

John Boyes made and lost three more fortunes in British East Africa, spent his final days driving a horse-drawn milk wagon in Nairobi, and died in 1951.

The Belgian Congo (later renamed Zaire) was granted its independence in 1960, and held the first and only free election in its history. This was followed by three years of the most savage inter-tribal bloodletting in the history of the continent. ●

OLD EARTH CONSIDERED AS A BLUEGRASS INSTRUMENT

Ground like a banjo skin stretched tight and scored
for the twang and pop of the roll—the ring of the tune—
Earth sounds to the beat; stars beat, air beats. She brings
along the time on green strings, strums the chord
full, round behind the sweet mandolin moon,
the quick fiddle of planets. The lead swings

around to her. We have sat listening,
hearts hiding from mad stars, the crazy moon.
Now deep bone in our bodies reels and rings.
Knee-deep in humming bluegrass, glistening,
we dance: she sings.

—Tony Daniel

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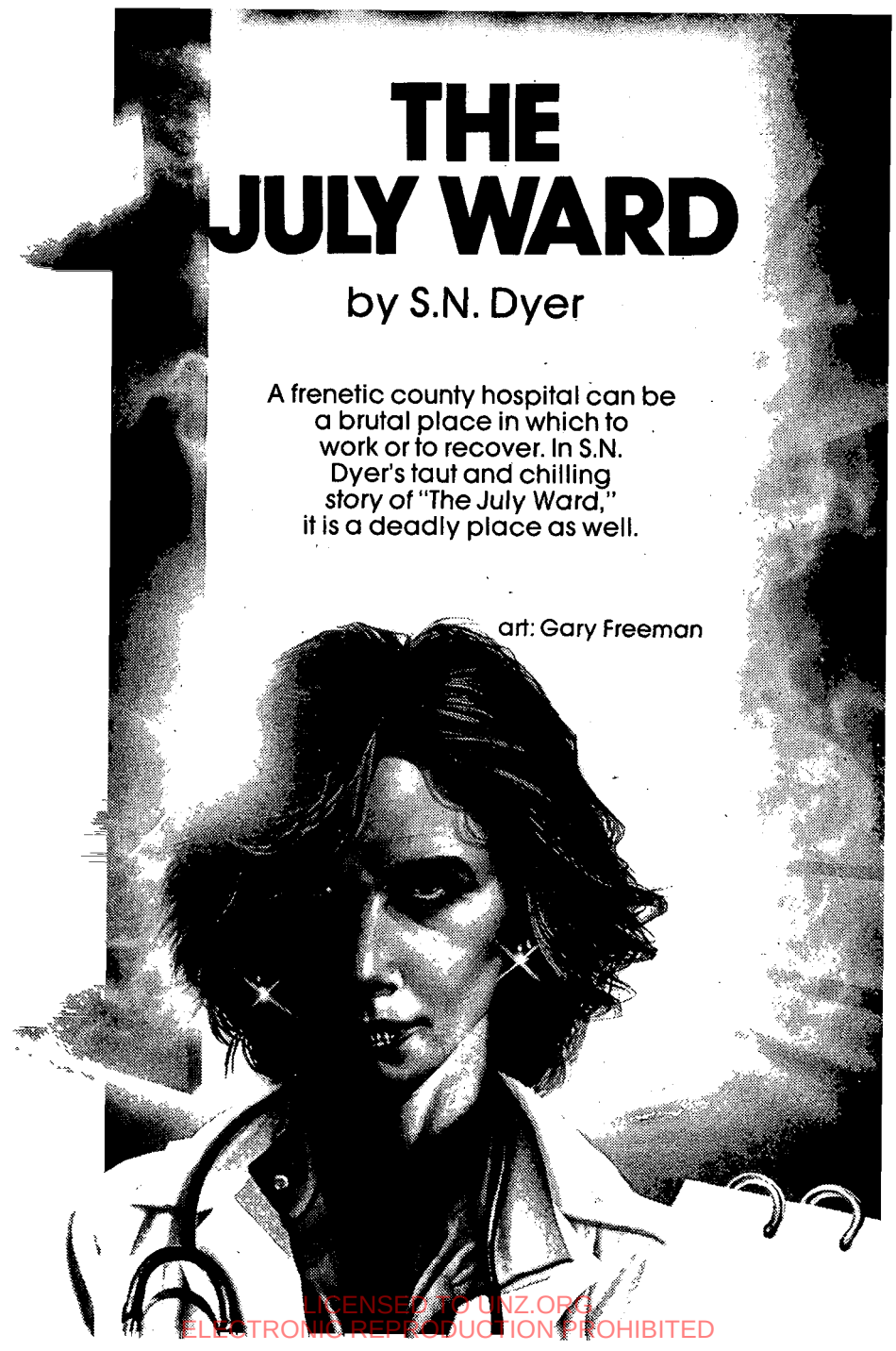
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THE JULY WARD

by S.N. Dyer

A frenetic county hospital can be a brutal place in which to work or to recover. In S.N. Dyer's taut and chilling story of "The July Ward," it is a deadly place as well.

art: Gary Freeman



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There is a place of which all doctors know, but none will speak.

It is 6:30 in the morning, and hardly worth anyone's while to try for sleep. The medical student has just finished writing admission orders for the new patient, and the night nurse is studying the page with a mixture of annoyance and disdain.

Watson ignores them, ignoring also the CT scan she has been admiring, with its textbook perfect depiction of a brain demolished by a bullet. She closes her eyes and, in the process of rubbing them, experiences the intensive care unit anew.

There is the breathing of the ancient man with Cheyne-Stokes respirations: shallow, deep, deeper, loud gasp and shudder, shallow, shallower, pause for a long time. An old ventilator is breathing for the newest patient: *whoosh clunk sssshh,* over and over, twenty times a minute. As counterpoint, the unit's sole heart monitor beeps an out of sync 80/minute, with the occasional interposed beat of an extra systole, or the brief syncopation of a bigeminal rhythm.

Next, Watson becomes aware of the early morning smells, of blood and decay, tube-feeding and feces, cheap wine and vomitus. Soon, someone will mop the floor and someone else deliver trays, and the odors of ammonia and hospital food will merge into the unsavory whole.

She opens her eyes, taking in the cracked plaster, six beds, shelves piled haphazardly with a random selection of unneeded equipment; sighing, she begins moving towards the door. As she passes the man in bed four, his bandaged head swivels to follow her.

"Waitress!" he calls. "Waitress, I want a tuna fish sandwich!"

The medical student—Watson has just spent twenty-two straight hours in his company and cannot remember his first name, just the inhumanly neat way he signs it—comes to her defense.

"Excuse me, Mr. Johnson," he says. "You're not in a restaurant."

Watson grimaces. The pushy kid is going to try to orient the patient. Had she ever been so naïve and idealistic, even on her own second day of the wards? *T.* His name starts with a *T.*

"Mr. Johnson, you're in the neurology/neurosurgery intensive care unit of Warren G. Harding Industrial County Hospital."

The patient ignores him, repeating angrily, "Waitress, I want a tuna fish sandwich."

Watson says, "Here, let me show you how it's done." She approaches the patient, standing at the foot of his hospital bed.

"Waitress. . . ." he begins.

"I'm sorry, sir. This is not my table."

Grabbing her student by the elbow, she leads him out of the unit. The

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benches outside are mercifully empty, so they need not be polite to hovering families. "Now what?" he asks.

"Huh?" She is trying to remember if he's named Tony or Tom or Ted.

"What do we do now?" He has never been on call before, and he's riding an adrenaline high. Twenty-two hours, and he's gung-ho for more.

She pauses to think about it. A considerate resident might tell him to go work on his presentation, but who needs to prepare to talk about a simple gunshot wound? Or, up at University Hospital, she might tell him to clean up, change, eat breakfast. But here at Harding the showers in the doctors' call rooms have no curtains and no water. Besides, it's accepted that the team coming off call will continue to wear wrinkled, blood-spattered scrubsuits, as a visual reminder to everyone else that they are tired, and short-tempered, and not likely to look charitably upon any attempts at denigration or one-upmanship. And the cafeteria will not open for another half-hour.

Gazing out the window, Watson can see the sky growing pink behind the silhouettes of the hospital complex. There are half a dozen towers of varying height and architecture, monuments to half a dozen periods of relative affluence. The majority of buildings are now silent and dark.

"It's kind of like an old castle," she says. "You know, built with no plan, every generation adding something."

"With secret passages and haunted dungeons?" asks the kid, getting into the spirit of the matter. This cheers her. She tried to tell this to another student once, eleven long months ago, only to discover he was a cheap knock-off robot with absent humor circuits. Try to tell that kind of medical student a joke, and he'll reply "Will this be on the test?"

She points to the buildings in turn, starting with the ruins of the nursing dorm. "The original Norman donjon." Then the infectious disease wing, a gift of the New Deal. "The fenestrated keep, built by the Mad Duke in 1485." Next, she aims at the New Tower, the last addition, built during the nationwide hospital expansion of the sixties, and where most of the patients are now housed. "The Georgian wing."

Getting into the spirit of it all, Tom—she has noticed the nametag on his short white jacket with its pockets crammed full of instruments and manuals—cackles. "Look, that light. Could it be . . . the la-bor-a-try of Doctor Frankenstein?"

She decides that she likes him after all, and decides what they will do next. Checking her watch—it is now twenty to seven—she nods down the half-lit hall. "Come on."

They go down the stairwell to the basement, the same basement they have traversed all night, bringing patients from the emergency room to radiology and then to ICU. As they stride, cockroaches scurry angrily from their path. Tom flinches once.

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"Jeeze!" he says. "It must be two inches long."

Watson feels momentarily sorry for him. His origins are written all over him: a neat, lawned half-acre in some well-kept suburb. The medical school has charged her with his education, and what has she done for him so far? Shown him drunks puking up blood and wine; a battered woman who attempts to steal his stethoscope when he leaves the room to get her a pain shot; children with needle tracks; and his final wonder, six-legged vermin that he has previously known only from the jokes on TV. But now she will show him something to make up for it all. Veering from the yellow line painted on the floor, the line that brings them home through the maze of corridors, she pries open a door that has been painted closed.

"There is a dimension beyond time and space . . ." she says, in her best Rod Serling voice, and leads him up dustcaked stairs illuminated only by their penlights. Two flights up, they lean hard against another door, and emerge into a large room.

"This is part of the original hospital," she says, her voice echoing against high ceilings. Her breath forms mist in the air—many windows are broken—and Tom tries to button his jacket, but the bulging pockets prevent it. "They built the new parts over and around the old foundation. But these are the first wards. They were still used up until the late seventies."

They prowl the empty ward, which is hesitantly brightening with sunrise. As the shadows diminish, they begin to make out cobwebs and cracked plaster. Pigeons, nesting in the rafters, glare at the intruders.

"There'd be patients down both sides, and in the summer when it got full, they'd run a row of beds down the middle. You'd move screens to examine a patient, or if someone was terminal."

"Look at this!" Tom has found a wooden wheelchair, not that much more antique or decrepit than those they have been using all night to transport patients, and sits on the hard, uncomfortable seat. Watson pushes him past the nursing desk in the hall, and into the adjoining ward. "They built them long and thin like this to maximize fresh air. The Florence Nightingale approach. This would be the women's ward." One of the tires is flat, and the student bounces regularly as they progress. The chair leaves thin tracks in the dirt.

Tom leaps from the chair and runs to an incredibly tall floor fan, reaching to his breast pocket. "Great!" His footsteps raise clouds of dust that smell like guano.

"When it got hot, they'd put a tub of ice at the front of a ward, and aim a fan over it." A patient had told her that, an old, old woman who'd been a nurse at this very hospital during the Depression. When Watson had met her, she'd been in her nineties, boney and pale, identical in

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appearance to all other patients in their nineties, as if those final ten years erase the distinguishing characteristics that make up the individual. But she had been surprisingly aware, and when she had died. . . .

"Where's this go?" asks Tom, waving at a heavy dark wood door on the outside wall, a door that should, by rights, lead nowhere.

"Don't open that! It's not time to open that—we'd better get back," snaps Watson, turning abruptly. Her footsteps blend into street noises that are only now growing audible. Tom looks briefly about the ward, allows his gaze to linger upon the door, then runs to follow his resident.

At breakfast, their table is invaded by the surgery housestaff. They are in street clothes, and even the ones who have been up all night wear ties and neatly pressed short white coats. It is barely seven, but they have already completed an hour of rounding, and soon will be in the operating room. Tom stares in disbelief at their trays, piled high with pancakes, sausage, bacon, pints of chocolate milk, and large styrofoam cups of coffee. Surgeons are very serious about breakfast. They usually don't get a second meal.

The surgeons glance in Watson's general direction. "Hey," says the tallest one. He must be their chief resident; his white coat is knee-length. Also, years of work and abuse and sleep deprivation have worn away what little tact or courtesy he might ever have possessed. "Hey, you neuro?"

"Uh-huh."

"You got that gunshot?"

Watson takes a long sip of coffee before replying. "John Doe #3." It has been a busy night for the unidentified.

Tom has been told that the gentleman in question is *his* patient, so he volunteers further information. "Thirty-eight caliber. The entrance is right occipital, and the exit left fronto-parietal." Saying this makes him feel very professional.

"Condition?" asks the surgeon, looking at Watson instead. She does not appreciate his snubbing her medical student, and knows also that if her own chief were here, he would be ignoring her as well. He has an arrogant manner that makes her uncertain if she feels furious or worthless.

"Bullet turned the brain to jello. He's herniated."

"Braindead?"

"Not yet. But soon."

"Suicide?"

"No. Met the Dude Brothers."

Tom asks, "Huh?"

She looks away from the surgery chief to explain, a carefully calculated

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breach of etiquette. "You ask someone in the E.R. who beat them up, it's always *'some dudes.'* No one will ever tell you who did it, or admit that it was only one guy."

"The Dude Brothers," Tom repeats, pleased, as if every new bit of slang makes him that much closer to being a doctor.

"Homicide," the surgeon is saying. "That's a little tougher, but the coroner's usually cooperative. He a druggie?"

She shakes her head. There is a drug war going on, and the wound pattern is that favored in street executions. But, like the previous victims in the current conflict, her patient appears to have been an enforcer, not an addict. "No tracks. He's a great specimen."

The surgeon smiles. Finally, She knows exactly what he is thinking. *One heart. One liver. Two kidneys.*

"And a partridge in a pear tree," she adds aloud, confirming the surgeons' opinion that you gotta be crazy to go into neurology. "Just one problem. He's a John Doe. No organ donor card. No family. And even if we found them . . ."

The surgeon gives her that look, like he's Bonaparte, Caesar, Patton, and she's some worthless footsoldier assigned to hold the ridge.

"Let me worry about that. You just keep him going 'til we get permission to harvest the organs."

They straggle in to morning rounds, clutching styrofoam lifelines. Breakfast and caffeine have worked paradoxically; the now off-call team is starting to crash. Watson is shivering as she tells the group (her fellow junior resident, the chief resident, two internal medicine interns, two nameless third-year medical students) about the new admissions. Tom is leaning against the wall, yawning, occasionally pinching himself, and in no way following the rules of medical decorum that he so carefully memorized a few days ago. For a second he actually drifts off to sleep, and sees the ghost of Osler coming through the ICU door, shouting "You will never be a doctor!" But then one of his classmates takes pity on him, and nudges him awake.

The residents are looking at him with bemused expressions. The years have almost numbed them to the pain of sleep deprivation, though they vaguely remember a time when they were still aware of their suffering. But the memories are dreamlike and uncertain, like a view into a prior incarnation.

"You get used to it," Watson says encouragingly.

The other resident grins at his students, who have not yet experienced an on-call night, and asks Tom, "So how's it feel, now that you're not a virgin anymore?"

"Rounds," the chief reminds them.

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They move to the bedside of the gunshot victim, and Tom begins a formal and totally disorganized presentation. The chief cuts him short after less than a minute. "Save it for the attending," he suggests. "Make it quick and dirty for work rounds."

Tom looks at Watson, who nods. He says, "John Doe #3. Met the Dude Brothers." The other medical students look puzzled, and their resident whispers, "Later."

They retire to the viewbox, where the chief resident makes funny humming noises while reviewing the CAT scan, briefly pimps the students (who cannot yet tell a bullet fragment from a calcified pineal gland), and then they return to the man on the bed. A fly has landed on the patient's half open right eye.

"Shit," says Watson. "I told the nurse to lacrilube them shut." She has respect for corneas, even though John Doe #3 will never need his again.

The chief demonstrates the way that the lids no longer spring closed, then shines a light in each eye. The pupils do not react.

"Midposition, fixed," he says. "What's that mean?"

The students stare blankly.

"What's with you guys? Don't you know any neuro?"

The other resident whispers to the chief. The medical student year is not quite in sync with the housestaff's; their students last week had been at the end of third-year, almost seniors—knowledgeable, canny, battle hardened. Now they have raw recruits again.

"Okay," the chief says. "I'll show you how to examine a comatose patient. First thing, you see if he can breathe on his own." So he disconnects the tube that connects the ventilator to John Doe's endotracheal tube, and they watch to see if any breaths occur. The respirator alarm begins to blare. Unfortunately, as it is an old machine, the alarm can't be switched off. Watson puts fingers in her ears to block out the raucous noise.

"Tell me if he starts," the chief directs, and runs through the rest of the exam, squeezing fingers and toes to cause pain, sticking q-tips in the eyes, tongue blades down the throat, ice water in the ears. The patient makes no response to any of these noxious stimuli, and after three breathless minutes, Watson reattaches the respirator. The alarm stops.

"Papilledema. Take a look," directs the chief, handing his ophthalmoscope to a student. She bends in close to an eye, trying to focus through the pupil to the retina behind, like trying to look through one keyhole into another keyhole. It is a technique that requires skill the student does not yet possess, and is made even more difficult by corneas clouded by exposure and neglect.

Watson notices that the medical student is holding her breath, and grins sympathetically. No one ever says anything about it, but the brain-

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dead smell different. Not a particularly unpleasant odor, like gangrene or enteric bacteria, but a faint, cold, wet, indefinable smell that Watson associates with patients with liquified cortex.

"Okay, enough, you can come back later," the chief says, changing his mind. Each student attempting fundoscopy will run through what little rounding time is left. "Three minutes without any respiratory effort? Okay, so he's braindead. What now?"

"Surgery wants him."

The other resident snickers. "Hey buddy, they want your body." The interns laugh, and the students look at them distastefully, except for Tom. He's starting to grasp the housestaff's grim humor.

"Fine with me," says the chief. "Get an EEG to confirm it, and they can have him whenever they want."

Watson points to the name on the wristband. *John Doe.*

"Oh. That's a problem." He looks around the unit. There is still one empty bed. "He can stay while they work that out. But if we need the bed. . . ."

An intern—he trained at one of those small Caribbean schools, looks a little like Dennis the Menace grown up, and is always a bit slow on the uptake—says "Hey, wait a minute. Organ donation? Don't we need permission from next-of-kin?"

Watson lets her mouth drop open. "Holy shit, you're right! Quick, Fred, go call the Doe family and ask them!"

The intern is halfway to the phone before he realizes that he's been had.

They are barely finishing rounding on the ward when the other resident is beeped to the E.R. He calls down, then gathers up his students and starts out. "Gunshot," he calls to Watson and the chief. He jabs his female student right about the midthoracic spine.

"The Dude Brothers have been busy little boys today," says the chief. "Take a 'tern; the studs should stay for attending rounds." The students look disappointed, worried they'll miss something exciting.

The team files into the conference room, a grimy place with mismatched chairs, windows nailed shut to prevent patient suicides, and a single window air conditioner that barely works. A few textbooks—the most recent at least ten years out of date—and dozens of X-ray folders litter the counters, near a primitive monocular microscope, bottles of outdated stain reagents, and a hemocytometer box labeled *STEAL THIS AND DIE!* The box is empty.

On the wall is an X-ray view box that looks old enough that, in a rare whimsical mood brought on by acute and chronic exhaustion, Watson tries to visualize when it was new, in a room where the wood paneling

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and marble are as yet unplastered. She imagines a conference of doctors, in high collars and starched white coats. On the view box, a visiting Dr. Dandy is showing off his first pneumoencephalogram.

She returns to the present and her own conference. A professor has come down from the University to hear the new cases and offer advice. Unfortunately, their current attending is junior faculty, newly arrived from one of the more civilized programs. Did they present to him complex, obscure, and abstruse cases, perhaps something due to an enzyme deficiency isolated only last week, or a rare cranial nerve syndrome first described in 1925, he should be informative and invaluable. Instead, they confront him daily with the same and the mundane: alcohol withdrawal seizures, delirium tremens, head trauma, alcohol withdrawal seizures. Tom presents his case and shows him John Doe's brain scan, and after the professor has pimped the students on which is bullet and which is calcified pineal, he has little else to add.

Later, back in the ICU, Watson sees the surgical chief resident going through John Doe's chart. She strides over quickly. As she passes bed four, the patient with the bandage starts up again.

"Waitress, I want . . ."

"It's not her table," snaps Tom.

Watson says, in her most unctuous voice, "May I help you?"

The alien chief wants blood and histocompatibility typing, cultures, more frequent vital signs, stat syphilis and AIDS serologies. He wants the intravenous fluids changed to the surgeons' favorite, lactated ringers. He wants everything to be thoroughly buffed when he triumphantly delivers the still-beating heart, the gleaming red liver, the happily perfusing kidneys, and the extraneous shell of body that surrounds them, to the transplant team up at the University Hospital.

The neurology chief steps in. "Look, I know this is important to you, and we'll help all we can. But there isn't any family to give permission yet, and the man's braindead." He decides to elaborate. General surgery residents are notorious for their incomprehension of neurologic principles.

"Everything upstairs is gone, including the autonomic centers in the medulla. His heart and blood pressure and kidneys are on autopilot now, and pretty soon they'll just get out of control, like an untuned engine that idles faster and faster and then goes haywire. You can keep a brainstem preparation going for months, but this guy's braindead; he won't last three days, and that's if we work hard."

"Then work hard. Or is that too much for you guys?"

Watson's chief gives him his *if you had one more neuron you'd have a synapse* smile, and answers sweetly, "We'll keep him as long as we can, or until we need a unit bed. And we're full now."

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"You've got one empty!" protests the surgeon.

At that minute the ICU doors swing open and the other resident and Fred the intern roll in a new patient.

"Besides," says the chief. "Even if you find the family, I'll bet a beer you don't get the parts. I've been here a long time and I've never . . ."

The surgeon nods, stalking out. "A beer." No one ever pays off on these bets.

The chief notices Tom standing there, mouth agape, and decides to finish his sentence. ". . . I've never had anyone donate organs. Face it, the families of people who live and die by violence just don't tend to be altruistic."

Tom frowns, trying to absorb and properly file away that bit of information.

As the new patient is being lifted off the gurney, he gazes across at John Doe and laughs. "Hey! Johnny! Hey, they got you too? Serves you right, you son of a bitch."

At noon, bored policemen descend upon the unit. They question the new patient, who won't tell them anything—his occupation, his assailants' identities, John Doe's real name. The police don't seem to care much. "It's not like they're shooting innocent kids or housewives or something," one of them remarks to the chief. Life might even improve, if every drug dealer in the city shot every other.

Tom hovers about the periphery, wearing an expression of intense fascination that he tries unsuccessfully to hide. He has not been this close to an actual policemen since Mister Traffic Safety reminded his first grade class to look both ways before crossing.

"What about our John Doe?" asks Watson.

"Is he gonna die?" the cop replies.

"He *is* dead. Technically braindead. I could turn off the ventilator now, only surgery's dying to use his parts for transplant. For that, we need family permission."

"We're running his prints."

"He's bound to have priors," the other policeman says.

Watson nods. "We'll keep him alive until you give us a name. Right, Tom?"

Pleased to be included, the student nods. "Right."

The new admission has a bullet lodged in his vertebral canal at T-10. In a way, he's lucky. If the bullet had not stopped there, it would have continued on though lung, diaphragm and liver, leaving an awful mess. However, the man is now permanently paralyzed below the umbilicus, never again to feel his legs, walk, fornicate, or control his bowels and

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bladder. He does not have a great appreciation for his good luck, or for the medical care that he is receiving, and everyone is secretly pleased when the consulting neurosurgeon decides that the wound needs to be debrided operatively. General anesthesia will give everyone a temporary break from his complaints.

Before leaving for the day, Tom and Watson look in on John Doe #3 one last time. He lies quietly, no movements except the periodic rise and fall of his chest as the respirator cycles. His body temperature is starting to climb and, though Watson expects it is just due to hypothalamic dysfunction, she orders chest X-ray, blood and urine cultures, puts him on a cooling blanket and tylenol suppositories, and covers potential infection with a broad-spectrum antibiotic.

"Say goodnight, John Doe," she says as she exits.

"Goodnight, John Doe," replies Tom, in a high-pitched voice.

The next morning they find out their patient's real name; it is not as memorable as John Doe, so they continue to refer to him as such. No one is surprised to find that he has more arrests than their attending has publications. He even has an outstanding warrant for murder, so the police put a shackle about the irreversibly comatose man's ankle to chain him to the bedframe, and assign three shifts of deputies to sit at the foot of the bed and make sure he does not escape.

"Great use of our tax dollars, huh?" asks Watson. She hauls Doe's knee into the air and tries for a reflex, knowing well that he has none, but enjoying the way the shackles clink as she does it.

The deputy is ready for retirement, and looks about as dangerous as any fat, elderly, napping man, but the presence of a uniform and a gun give the chief resident some comfort. Their paraplegic patient is contemplating singing to the police, giving them details of the drug war, its strategies, finances, and generals. The chief is convinced that, any moment now, Uzi-wielding dope dealers will enter the ICU and spray it with bullets, taking out their erstwhile colleague and any unlucky witnesses. Whenever the doors swing open, the chief flinches and starts to duck, and finally decides that it's time to visit the lab where he'll be working next month.

His paranoia infects the rest of the team. The other resident and an intern remember that they really ought to be in out-patient clinic; the students decamp to the library; Fred actually volunteers to scrub with a bad-tempered neurosurgeon on a routine back surgery.

Watson manages to reach John Doe's mother, in another state. The woman has the usual reaction to bad news. "How could this happen?" Watson avoids the response on the tip of her tongue—"Because he's a murderer, and this time someone got him first"—and tries to be kind and

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supportive. She explains how they've done everything medically possible, but the damage from the bullet is just too great. She expresses condolences, and finally broaches the subject of organ donation.

"It's so unfortunate," she says. A life cut short at only twenty-eight. Family and children—none of them legitimate—bereaved. But there's an opportunity for some good to come from this tragedy. His kidneys, liver, and heart can give life and hope to some other women's sons, some other children's fathers.

"Are you crazy?" replies John Doe's mother. "That stuff's his. We're not giving nothing away."

"Fine," says Watson. She has given up arguing with selfishness—all it's ever accomplished is to increase her aggravation. Senseless tragedy is senseless tragedy, and it won't be redeemed.

Tom is checking John Doe's pressure. "It's going down."

"No shit," replies Watson, nudging the foley collection bag with her foot. It is topping off with dilute urine. "When was this changed?"

"Half an hour ago. I think."

"He's pissing out pure water. So, what's that mean?"

The student looks at her blankly.

"Diabetes insipidus," she explains. "Posterior pituitary's gone."

He looks at her with surprise. Despite all the lectures and exam questions on renal physiology and sodium homeostasis, he has not until this moment realized that the facts he learned might apply to actual patients. "What do we do?"

She considers. If she follows the logical path, now that the next-of-kin has refused organ donation, and simply turns off the ventilator, she will have to notify the family, declare the patient legally dead, and go through all the other bureaucratic nonsense that such a case entails. There just isn't time for this; she has patients waiting in the emergency room.

"Vasopressin, and chase the fluids," she said, pointing at the as yet uncreased *Manual of Medical Therapeutics* in Tom's right coat pocket. "Read about D.I. Hey, what a learning experience!"

Hearing her voice, the bandaged patient across the aisle wakes. "Waitress, I want a tuna fish sandwich."

It is almost five before she finishes in the emergency room, having seen a succession of head injuries, hysterics, seizures (alcohol withdrawal, and patients with epilepsy who neglected to take their pills), and finally a brain hemorrhage stroke (a hypertensive who did not take his pills).

She calls the unit. Fred the intern comes on the line. "Got a big bleed, needs a bed in the unit. I'll be right up, and disconnect John Doe."

"Too late," replies Fred. "He crashed and Tom couldn't handle it. I just declared him."

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"Great." That will save her some time. Then she hears yelling in the background. "What's up?"

"That surgeon. He came in just when Doe transferred to the Eternal Care Unit, and he's pitching a fit."

"Doesn't he know the family refused?"

A phrase comes through, barely comprehensible. "You killed him! Now you've killed four other people too!"

"Shit," Watson cries. "Get him off of Tom. I'll be right there." She drops the receiver back onto the hook, tells a nurse "Hold him here in the E.R. till we clear the bed," and strides the yellow line in the basement to the stairway. Bounding up the stairs, she almost collides with the surgery chief.

"Where the hell do you get the right to yell at my student?"

"You stupid shits let him die!"

"He was *already* dead, goddamn it."

She pushes past him, not hearing his reply in its entirety. It just doesn't pay to fight with people who are taller and more powerful. Heading into the unit, she sees the nurse and her aide already fussing over the body. The room is quieter now that the respirator has stopped its cycling. The deputy is awake, and talking softly into the telephone.

"Tom? Hey, Fred, where's Tom?"

The intern is writing the death note. Not looking up, he points out the doors.

"Where'd he go?"

The nurse smiles as she replies. She hates her dead-end, thankless, underpaid job in this awful excuse for a hospital. The distress of young doctors in training is one of the few things in her life that gives her any pleasure. "That doctor kept calling him a murderer, and he looked like he was going to cry, and he left."

"Oh God," Watson whispers. She knows where he has gone. She knows she has to stop him.

There is a place of which all doctors know, though none are told. It may be reached by many paths. Watson runs to the stairwell in the basement, and then up to the old ward. She can see fresh footprints in the dust, leading to the door that should not be there. It opens with a wrench, and she takes the dark and twisted stairs cautiously. At the bottom, she is in the basement again, unlit save by small, high windows half-blocked by debris. The air is still and musty, and the only sounds are her breathing, and the rustle of something that she hopes is a mouse.

"Tom?" she calls, then heads off down the corridor. Further down it is lined with cabinets filled with pathology slides. They spill out of the drawers and a few lie upon the floor. Stopping as the basement becomes

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a tunnel, she leans briefly against a cabinet. A slide falls to the ground, shattering. Watson bends over, glancing at the remnants.

A slice of cervical spinal cord lies embedded for eternity between glass and coverslip. The stain has faded over the years, but the dorsal and lateral columns are clearly paler. This is the autopsy relic of some man or woman born years before Watson, or even Watson's parents; to die then also, of a disease that now Watson can recognize with an offhand glance, and could treat easily with B-12 injections. Is life fair? she thinks. Not hardly.

She stands and sprints down the tunnel. A veritable catacomb lies beneath the hospital. There are tunnels between buildings; dank tunnels to the mental hospital a block away (said to be more safe than crossing the street in the middle of the night, but none the less avoided); unknown tunnels to unknown places. Every few years a drunk will wander out of the emergency room and get lost in the tunnels, to be found weeks later by horrified engineers. And then there is this tunnel, which intersects with none of the others.

A single window is set into the wall. Watson pauses, wipes clear a circle on the glass, and finds herself looking into the hospital's pathology suite from an unexpected view. She is down low, near the antique autopsy table with its grooves and pails. Across from her is the door into the morgue, and to the left she can see the steep, hard rows of the amphitheater.

She runs on. It is close now. If she stops, holds her breath, concentrates, she might hear a variety of sounds. Sobs. Moans. Agonal respirations. The lamentations of the living and the final exhalations of the dying. The screams of the delirious and the shrieks of the unanaesthetized.

Ahead is a halo of light, coming around the edges of a door in the wall at the end of the tunnel. It is a wooden door, dark, ponderous, smooth and pale about the handle, and the brass embossed sign, in square letters with serifs, bears the name. THE JULY WARD.

Tom has his hand upon the knob, and is preparing to enter. "No!" shouts Watson, managing to reach him and slam shut the door, while spinning him away from it. "No, it's not your time yet. . . ."

He looks at her with reddened eyes. Where does the light come from, now that the door is closed? She only knows that she can see the tears, welling in the inner canthi of his eyes.

"It's not your time yet," she repeats. "You're not a doctor, you can't go in there. Or you'll never come out."

"But I killed him . . . the surgery chief said . . ."

"The surgery chief is an asshole. You didn't kill John Doe. He was already dead!"

She leads him back down the hall. "You can't go in there yet. Not yet.

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"In two years, on July first, you'll become an intern. Someday you'll have a patient. You won't know what's wrong—you're young, inexperienced, you can't know everything, and ultimately no one else can help you. It's inevitable. Someday—maybe it'll be in July, maybe it won't—someday, someone will die because you don't know something, or you made a wrong decision. And you're a doctor. Then, you can come here. You may be in another hospital entirely, but you'll come here, and you'll find your patient. . . ."

He looks back. The door seems indistinct now. "Did you . . ."

"Do you know how many pages there are in *Harrison's Textbook of Internal Medicine?*" she asks. "At least 1200, big pages, with little print. You know how much mention rhabdomyolysis gets in *Harrison's?* One line. One line about a fairly frequent, potentially fatal condition. I've read a sixty page paper on it. But that was a little late."

They find themselves, strangely, in the basement of the hospital near the yellow line, which they follow towards the ICU. A gurney passes by, pushed by an orderly. Something large and wrapped in plastic lies on the gurney, its identity undisguised by a sheet.

Watson and Tom stand to the side, letting the gurney pass. She waves. "Goodbye, John Doe #3."

"Now what?"

She shrugs. "Now you go home and get a good night's sleep. We're on call again tomorrow." She stops a moment, frowning. "I imagine it'll be a tough day, too. The chief won't stay around much, now that we've lost our deputy."

Tomorrow is indeed a bad day. They miss lunch, they miss dinner. The Dude Brothers have been busy. The unit is full of head trauma cases, with more on the ward, making do with less careful observation. The paraplegic patient, still in the unit because of a mysterious fever, has gone beyond anger and is depressed now, speaking to no one. To either side of him, semi-conscious men moan and occasionally retch. As Watson passes the bandaged man in bed four, he sits bolt upright, stares at her, and shouts "I want a tuna fish sandwich!"

"Stand in line," she replies.

Tom has been futilely sticking a syringe over and over into one of the new admissions, trying to start an intravenous line. Watson comes over to watch him.

"You're getting the hang of it," she remarks. "Only you'll never get this one."

He shakes his head. "These are great veins. They're standing right up, you can see them . . . it must be my technique."

"Your technique's fine, the fault's his. He's a junkie. Those veins are

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thrombosed." She takes away the arm, and hunts. There's something on the right thumb that she may be able to thread with a 22-gauge butterfly needle. It's that, or a central line.

"Make you a deal," she says. "You go for burgers, and I'll get the IV."

"Fries and a shake?"

"Diet cola."

He laughs, hunts his many pockets for car keys, and leaves. She sits down and reapplies the tourniquet, slapping the man's forearm to bring up the veins. They're all shot, literally. Maybe she should go on TV, as a public service announcement. Don't shoot dope, kids. You'll ruin your veins. Then, when the doctors need to put in an IV, they'll have to stick a big old needle right into the major veins in your chest, with the chance of bleeding, or infection, or a collapsed lung.

"Aha." She decides she can get that sucker on the thumb after all, maybe even with a 20-gauge. Having survived an internship, Watson has the hubris to believe that she could draw blood from a turnip. She tears off strips of tape, opens the betadine ointment, has everything ready, then wipes alcohol on the vein and stops.

"Damn." She'll need an armboard. "Hey," she calls. No one answers. The night nurse must be busy, or asleep somewhere. She drops the arm back on the bed, tourniquet still on. Were he conscious, the man would be writhing in pain. She goes into the stock room in front, hunting angrily. Don't they have anything? And if so, why isn't it where it should be?

She hears the doors to the unit open.

"Good," she mutters. It's past visiting hours, so it can only be the nurse returning. She'll know where the armboards are. Unless, of course, it's Tom, coming back to see if she prefers Burger King or McDonald's. She heads out of the supply room, and freezes.

"What do you guys want?" says the voice of the paraplegic drug dealer.

"We don't want you to talk," a voice replies.

"Oh shit," Watson starts to say, and shrinks back into the doorway. *Oh shit.* The chief resident's paranoia was on target.

She can hear the sound of a gun, of silenced bullets going into soft flesh and the mattress behind. *Thock thock thock.* Just like on TV. She holds her breath, afraid to breathe. They'll be looking around the unit now, anyone else they need to waste? They are going from bed to bed, now they are at the back end of the unit. Two of them. Pistols, not Uzis. The chief resident was wrong. If they'll just go in to check the nursing lounge, maybe she can duck out.

She is almost to the front door when the patient in bed four sees her. "Waitress!"

The men with guns bolt out of the lounge, and she abandons silence

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and begins to run. A bullet passes by her head. Pistols must be hard to aim. No wonder the bullets always seem to wind up in unexpected places in her patients.

Ducking into the stairwell, she wishes she'd stayed in better shape. She can work thirty-six hours straight, but running is beyond her. Already, as she heads down the basement, hearing the stairwell door slam and then open again behind her, already she is winded.

Where to go? The pharmacy? Locked. The emergency room? They do have a guard there. But by the time he figures out what's going on, figures out how to draw his gun, the place will be an abbatoir. Where to go?

She knows.

She cuts off into a tunnel. Why did they have to build the morgue so far away, so cut off even from the original hospital? Was it to contain germs? Or as some kind of symbolic gesture?

"Stop, motherfucker!" a man's voice yells at her. The shot that follows makes compliance unlikely. Goddam, which way? She's only been to one autopsy here. Go ahead, they tell the docs. Keep Dad or Grampa or little Joey alive long after he should be allowed to die. So we keep his heart going and his lungs working and keep him in agony because his body can't survive, but they won't let us let him go. And when he finally dies, days or weeks or months after he should have—You want an autopsy? What, are you crazy? Hasn't he suffered enough?

The morgue. This is the way. She tries the door, then hits it angrily with her palm. Locked. Okay. Up the tunnel. It's slanting uphill. If you lost your grip on a gurney carrying a corpse, it would careen downhill until it ran into a wall, or came to rest near the outpatient pharmacy, where the clinic patients wait to have their prescriptions filled. Wouldn't that be a cheerful sight?

The door to the amphitheater is unlocked. It's dark inside, except for a light someone's left on down in front, by the display cases. Did doctors ever trip on these precipitous stairs, interrupting some learned professor's discourse as they toppled to their deaths? She has to take them slowly, watched by the ancient dissections below. Here are skeletons and bottled fetuses and hands, palms flayed open to show their inner workings, reaching out as on the Sistine Chapel. Here is the preserved torso of a young man who lived and died before motorcars or radio, and when he was struck down by a horsedrawn trolley, astonished doctors found that his organs were all on the wrong side. Here is the face of an infant with a single eye, and a trunk-like nose above it. Here are legs poised forever to step, hearts waiting to beat. Here are the heads of unsuspecting paupers who have been made into demonstrations of normal anatomy, and wear expressions that seem vaguely surprised.

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She gets to the door with the window, alongside the guttered table with its century of knife marks. The door is barely noticeable, dark wood faded into dark wood. She grabs the handle and twists. It is not locked. Who would want to try it? But it is stuck, and she takes it with both hands and braces her foot and pulls. The men are coming in the door now, about to take aim but momentarily shocked by the grisly displays.

"Sheeeit," a man says. The other whistles.

Watson snatches up the nearest object, a breadloafed slice of brain embeddened in a block of glass. It is very old; the definition between gray and white matter has faded, and the sloshing liquid inside has a froth at the top, yellow cholesterol leached out over the years. She throws the specimen, then another, and finally the entire cerebellum for good measure. None come close, but the sounds of smashing and the smell of ancient fixative give her a feeling of accomplishment.

The nearest thug raises his pistol. Watson falls back against the door—and it opens outward.

"I'll be damned," she says, and begins to run down the hall, past the rows of cabinets, too heavy to topple. Behind her, she can hear curses, as her foes try to get down the steep steps, now slick with lipid-rich alcohol and bits of brain.

They aren't even trying to shoot anymore, just running after her, closing the lead. She doesn't want to think about what's going to happen when they catch her. And then she sees it. The dark door and the brass sign.

She pulls it open, and she is inside. Inside the July Ward.

It is an old-fashioned ward, beds down either side, but some are barely pallets, others old-fashioned hospital beds, still others are high tech automatic beds, one even with a ventilator at its side. Patients stare at her from each bed, recognize that she is not the one for whom they wait, and look away. Ghostly orderlies—she cannot make out their details—approach, recognize her as a doctor, and step aside deferentially.

She stops running, smooths her white coat and straightens her scrub-suit, then goes down the row of beds, walking purposefully but sedately, the way a doctor should, glancing at the nametags and the bedside vitals charts. Many of the patients in the newer beds are in their nineties, and all patients in their nineties look alike.

Behind her, she can hear her enemies enter, hears a gunshot that seems to hit the ceiling, hears polite but firm voices (whispery, unreal).

"You cannot be here."

"Leggo, man. Shit, what *is* this?"

"This is the July Ward," comes the answer. "In this ward we admit only special patients: the first patient that a doctor lets die too soon; that a doctor kills. You cannot be here."

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Watson has found the bed she is looking for. There is an old woman on it, frail and edematous, fluids running into an arm marked with bruises and swelling from ancient veins that cannot long support a line. The bag at the end of her catheter shows scant urine, with the faint pink tinge that Watson now knows might mean rhabdomyolysis, muscle breakdown products that, left untreated—or even despite treatment—may kill the kidneys. And the patient.

The woman in the bed looks up. "Yes, dear?" she asks. You can hear the fluid in her lungs as she speaks.

"I came to . . . say I'm sorry."

"You've already apologized," the woman replies, very kindly. "You'll have to stop coming here. It just isn't healthy." Watson turns away, and the old woman calls after her, softening the hard advice. "But thank you for visiting, dear. It was very kind."

Behind her, she can hear the woman address the patient in the next bed. "My doctor. Such a nice girl."

Watson strides back between the rows of patients, past the two gunmen, subdued now by orderlies. She sees the men, faces blanched with fear, unable to speak as they twist in the grip of arms that will not come into focus. Their eyes are wide with terror and pleading, and she finds it hard to not stop and order their release. But she does have some common sense.

"You keep this ward very well," Watson says. The orderlies nod. It is always good for a doctor to compliment the staff on a job well done. "I won't be back."

She closes the door behind her. What will become of the gunmen? She has no idea. But she knows this: only two kinds of people may enter the July Ward—doctors, and the dead. And only the doctors may leave.

But not completely. Never completely.

There is a place of which all doctors know, but none will speak. ●

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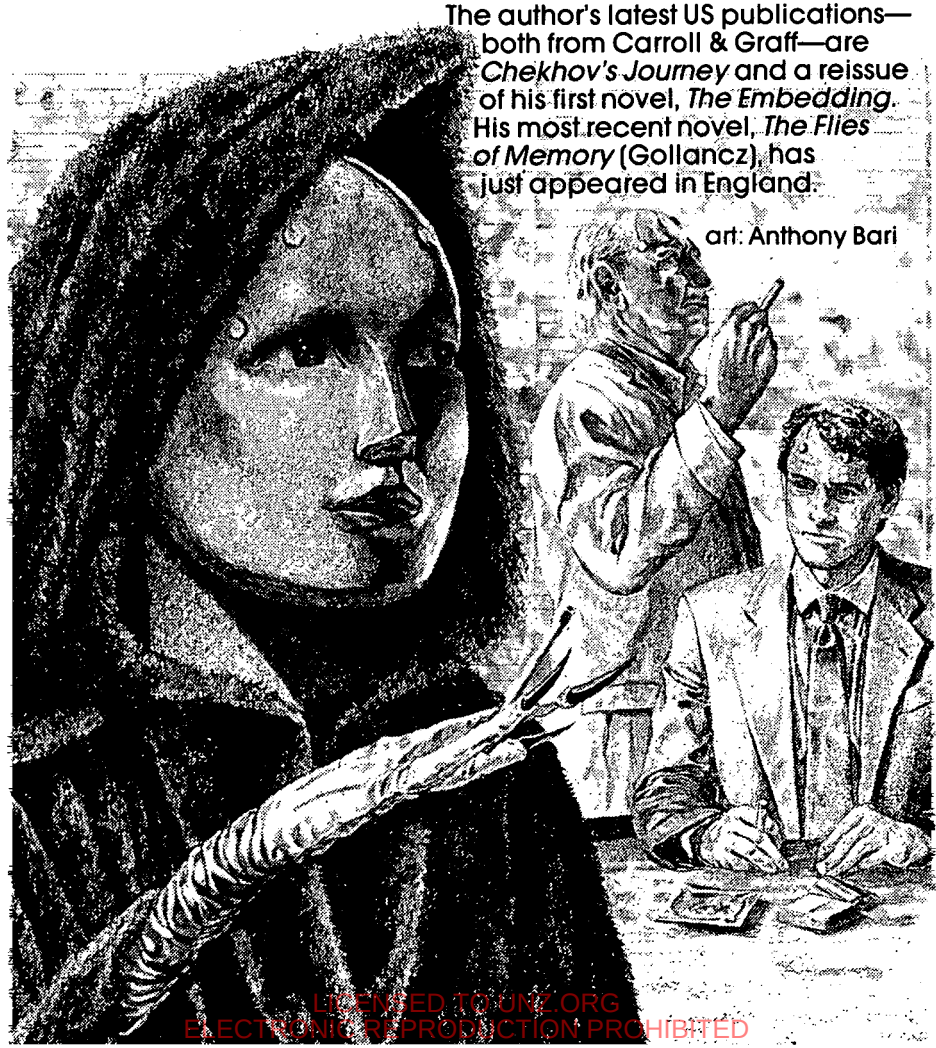
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THE ODOR OF COCKTAIL CIGARETTES

by Ian Watson

The author's latest US publications—both from Carroll & Graff—are *Chekhov's Journey* and a reissue of his first novel, *The Embedding*. His most recent novel, *The Flies of Memory* (Gollancz), has just appeared in England.

art: Anthony Bari



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"Shall we start?" the alien, Mirrion, asked the remaining five of us. Its voice sounded like a heavy breather's on the telephone late at night. Perhaps Earth's air made it asthmatic. From a fold of its enveloping fur cloak it conjured an iridescent packet of cocktail cigarettes, stripped the cellophane wrapping, and slapped the cardboard box down on the round oak table.

At first we had wondered if that lustrous black cloak was part of the alien's body. Seemingly not; though what hid beneath? A biped body, no doubt. One arm stayed out of sight, tucked away like an amputee's stump. As to the other, Mirrion wore a yellow glove on its three-digit hand. Long brown fingernails poked through the ends of the material. Sometimes those retracted, so perhaps they were claws.

Mirrion's head, within the furry hood, was hairless, oval, and pink as a burn victim who had undergone plastic surgery. Blue human eyes, a dainty human nose, rosebud lips, disclosing neat incisors. An imitation of a lovely human face, attached to the body of a sphinx, an enigma with claws. I regarded Mirrion's head as pseudoflesh, fancying that its features had been specially grown or remolded into a form acceptable to us on Earth, whereas perhaps the alien hadn't bothered to alter the rest of its body much. In one novel I myself had invented aliens who could change their bodies to fit in with the natives they visited.

Pink louver blinds blanked the windows of the suite. Unseen outside of our hotel: a last slice of Las Vegas, giving way to scrubby desert. The little alien globeship was afloat in Lake Mead near the Hoover Dam. I recalled Steve McQueen in some movie—*The Cincinnati Kid?*—and thought of the Sobranie cigarettes as a pack of cards, a new deck freshly opened by the dealer, who was wiping us out one by one.

Day seven of the game . . .

"Today we play at color-worlds," wheezed Mirrion. "Colors exist in your eyes and your brain—especially in that wondrous porridge inside your skulls! This glove of mine is yellow, yet your eyes can't perceive yellow at all. Your retinas only heed red and blue and green—"

"How do *you* know what our retinas heed?" asked Buck Henderson. General Buckmaster Henderson, USAF, strategic planner, war gamer. Buck, of the piercing gaze. A tall man with a spare lean build, thick shoulders, cropped red hair.

Good question. How did these aliens know? Had they captured and dissected human beings? Had they submitted hypnotized captives to superscience body-scans? Don't forget those possible claws, and the way Mirrion wore fur, perhaps synthetic but perhaps the rich pelt of some alien animal. How fierce were these aliens in their own backyard?

"What you see as pure and simple yellow is a blend of red and green," Mirrion continued, unperturbed. "As to the sheer wealth of colors you

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imagine you see in your environment, why, some very high-level processing occurs in the porridge! Ingenious! Your brain paints the world for you. *How* high is that level of processing? We shall soon see." With its claw it levered open the box of Sobranie and parted the golden leaf of paper within. . . .

Eleven of us had commenced the game series with the alien, but I strongly suspected that Mirrion would survive until the final round, when the single remaining human champion would confront it, to win or to lose. Supposedly the games weren't stacked in our disfavor. Did not Mirrion play with one hand—not exactly tied behind its back, but out of sight?

So this last player should be our best hope. Win, and the gateway to the stars would open. Fail, and he or she too would vanish into interspace to join previous losers locked in that mind-dimension. To what end? To be borne away by Mirrion as data to a distant world? As exhibits, trophies, souvenirs?—who might thereafter be interacted with by alien whelps for their amusement or edification?

We players wore brain-nets which submerged us in the game scenarios. Mirrion likewise, beneath its hood. So far, whenever we returned to the reality of the hotel suite, one of us would be gone—into interspace, whatever and wherever *that* might be.

Mirrion kept the room locked while we played. Secret service agents patroled the whole hotel. After a game, we remaining people dispersed to our bedrooms and faced questions from different teams of intelligence experts. Mirrion stayed in the gaming suite.

The first few scenarios had been mazes, Escher worlds where the rules emerged in rapport with the on-going events. Imagine moving a chess piece (which happened to be oneself) and discovering the laws of chess movement in the process.

Successive games were becoming less abstract, more primary. Soon we might reach the level of raw emotion, the territory of the Id and nightmares. Would Mirrion really extrude its claws then, really bare its teeth?

Of course these games were tests. Although the alien had not said so in as many words, Mirrion was assessing the mental development—and future potential?—of the human race.

"Let us smoke a cigarette each," invited Mirrion.

Each previous game had commenced with the alien conjuring some such commonplace objects out of its cloak. Rubber bands, paper clips linked together, balloons.

"I don't smoke," objected Shar. That's Dahlia Czarnomski, but she'd told us to abbreviate her nameski. Shar was fat—at least two hundred

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and fifty pounds in her bulky brown monk's robe. Dark lank hair framed a broad bland pudding of a face in which were set the sultanas raisins of her eyes. No point in surmising that she might have used some cigarettes as appetite suppressants.

Shar was a top role-playing game designer, a profession I did not admire too much. Right there on the fringes of my own bailiwick, of serious science fiction, crowded all those grotesque miniature models armed to the teeth (and the fangs, and the tusks) with power-swords and volcano-guns: figures forever in combat, since what else could they get up to? Should they debate epistemology, the validity of knowledge? Should they investigate the nature of the universe and the psychology of aliens? Shar was responsible for *Dread Domain,* which was currently sweeping America. Cartoons on TV, the whole shebang.

However, Shar had won through to Round Seven; which was more than could be said for our NSA cryptographer, or our mathematician—or for our Jungian psychologist or our chess grand master or our pentathlon champion or our Californian shaman. All gone into interspace, all lost.

"I don't smoke either," said Chandler Brennan, our hot-shot young tycoon, a billionaire by the age of thirty-three.

"Today we all consume a cigarette," repeated Mirrion. "We hold it, we regard it, we set fire to it, we inhale it."

Buck Henderson peered jovially at the pastel tubes with their long gold filters. "Come on, guys, it's part of the game. One cancer stick can't nail you."

"Each choose a color, please."

Five shades of cigarettes, five players . . . plus Mirrion. I consulted a color chart in my head, alien landscapes for the use of. The cocktail Sobranie were cadmium yellow, emerald green, madder—no, *rose*-madder, cobalt violet, and cerulean blue with a tinge of violet.

Was there some significance to which color we chose? Buck promptly selected rose-madder. Why? Brennan's hand darted out and captured violet. He scowled briefly, dissatisfied. *He* had wanted the red hue. Violet most resembled it in mood, though actually it was at the other end of the spectrum. Freyda Costello hesitated, then took yellow.

"After you," I told Shar. Always be courteous to those you despise, thus to establish your superiority. We hardly had much range of choice left. With a grunt she picked up green; which left me with the blue. Blue skies, blue seas. Why not?

Speaking of range of choice, the government had trawled a strange net to recruit the original eleven of us, yet some bizarre choices appeared to be paying off.

How, on the spur of the moment, *did* you choose eleven players for a

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mind-game devised by aliens? Well, you included a top code-breaker and intelligence analyst from the National Security Agency, right? A lady psychologist made sense. Maybe she worked for the NSA, too. Toss in a top athlete, flexible in five different fields of endeavor; the logic of the body might play a role. A general, oh yes; and Buck was still with us. My opinion of the military had climbed. Include an ace computer hacker —Freyda—who was readily available in prison; offer her a pardon. *Persuade* a tycoon, self-made boss of Brennan Enterprises International, who was looking for fresh worlds to conquer. Our shaman, Carl Martinez, may indeed have spent years taking dream-trips among the Huichol down Mexico way before setting up his Center for Integrative Shamanistics in Berkeley, but he didn't come back from the very first outing with Mirrion. Strike mysticism as a bright approach, though full marks to our government for innovative thinking and trying to cover all the bases.

My own recruitment was flattering, challenging, sinister, embarrassing.

Sinister, on account of the government agencies hovering in the wings and the awareness that my life to date had been swiftly strip-mined not by some amiably disposed fannish bibliographer or associate professor but by hard-eyed faceless spooks with supercomputers at their fingertips. Flattering, since I now bid fair to be *the* science fiction writer, did I not? Challenging, in the put-up-or-shut-up sense. How much I had written about comprehending imaginary aliens! Time, now, to prove that it wasn't all hot air.

Embarrassing, too. In no story or novel of mine had I ever referred to the existence of my own genre. I had never included a science fiction author or reader as a character. I had even devoted one Guest of Honor speech to deploring the science fictional in-joke, the self-reference which may appeal cozily to some benighted souls but which destroys believability for me, knocks away the scaffolding. Doesn't happen too often, yet when it does: bang goes the book, splat goes the story. What, me, James Swallow, posing as protagonist in a "first contact" event? I blushed.

Five colors; five players. And Mirrion. Mirrion chose a rose-madder Sobranie, the same as Buck Henderson's. Was the alien targeting the general by means of some resonance with the aim of eliminating him next? Were we being selectively erased according to the level of threat we represented? But in ascending or descending order, which? What if the Shaman of Berkeley had been our strongest card after all, and we who now remained were the risible residue rather than the acme of the human race?

I'd noticed Shar at a number of conventions. Who could miss a large

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lady monk? Till we met up in this inn at Las Vegas I'd never actually exchanged words with her.

Mirrion did something and its cigarette smoldered. Buck and I both carried Zippo lighters, I was amused to note. Very soon six cigarettes were on line. Inhaling the mellow Balkan scent, I studied the urgent blue whisper of smoke. A ring of blue paper burned to light brown, to black, to ash, measurable as the descent of sand in an hour-glass . . .

Blue trees resembling oaks, hung with blankets of blue creeper. Blue undergrowth and grass, blue sky, blue sun, blue boulders, a gently curving blue ceramic path. My hands were blue, though not due to cold. Hard to distinguish outlines! My porridge must be working overtime adding depth and contours by guesswork based on what a landscape ought to contain. Remembering puzzle pictures where faces hid in foliage and on the bark of trees, I wondered what I might be *failing* to see. I blinked to strobe the scene, I squinted to give myself a dose of double vision. I walked along the path, since a path exists to be walked along. Came to a clearing, where seven blue paths met.

Here came some clues: arrows imprinted in every pathway save the one I arrived by. Green arrow, violet arrow, two black arrows, and two of a lighter shade of blue.

Violet should lead me to Brennan: green to Shar. But wait. Could a true green arrow appear in a blue-drenched world? Surely the color that I saw printed on that particular path was *yellow,* the color of Freyda's cigarette. Yellow plus blue made green. The violet arrow must be red, Buck's color—not to mention Mirrion's. Ought I to hunt for Mirrion or avoid the alien?

Now that I stared hard enough my own path *did* sport an arrow, which was blue. Blue on blue. Those lighter blue arrows must be white, seen in blue light. I felt almightily confused. Must explore, though. Obviously one failed by staying put and doing nothing. I heard a rumbling, as of thunder, in the woods. The voice of a beast? The beast of interspace? I chose the path with the green arrow.

I walked with increasing difficulty along that gently arcing path since everything was becoming the same blue blur. My brain was habituating to the identical hue that pervaded everything in sight; my grey matter was resigning from the effort of trying to discriminate and delineate outlines. I realized that the deep basso growl from behind had come none too soon to spur me on my way. Other players might have tried to hide in the bushes instead of exposing themselves on the path. Before long I might become blue-blind, surrounded by sights that no longer possessed any meaning.

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Without transition the whole world became yellow. Yellow sun in a yellow sky, yellow forest, yellow path. My eyes and my dulling brain suffered a fierce shock and I staggered before picking up my pace. Blue had been restful; this yellow zone glared at me.

After a while another arcing yellow pathway cut across my own, allowing three choices of route. And a fourth, of course: to return to the balm of blue. I rejected that pusillanimous option. No arrows showed at this junction; maybe I had already seen all the arrows I would ever see. I cudgeled my memory to recall the previous lay-out. Again the woods grumbled, from no special direction. My head started to ache. In this mindscape I was still wearing the slacks, silk shirt, and safari jacket I'd been wearing in the hotel suite; all in yellow. The shirt had been red; it wasn't orange now—nor, as I now realized, had it been violet when I first "emerged." Colors were curiously intrinsic here.

A bulky shape bustled with determination along the right-hand path toward me. With an effort I recognized a large lady monk.

"Shar! Have you met anybody else?"

"Should I tell you?" Shar was heaving her breaths. "Should we be partners?"

"We're all partners against Mirrion," I reminded her.

"You're a snob, Swallow."

"Sorry. I try not to be."

"Meaning that you have ample reason to be snobbish if you choose?" Okay, she was intelligent. Just, her values were different from mine. Conceivably she was relishing this game come to life. *A meeting in the forest of the yellow lord's demesne; how many power-points does the Scribe command? Shake a twelve-sided die in her head to decide! Where is the Master Merchant? Where is the Warrior Chief?* (In other words, Brennan and Henderson . . .)

"How many color strips you cross so far?" she asked.

"Just this one and blue."

She ticked off: "Well, I've come through green, orange, yellow, green again—that was a mistake—back to yellow. You're slow, Swallow. How soon does yellow end? Which way's blue?"

I told her.

She mused. "Now do I go that way or not?" Oh God, she *was* throwing dice in her mind, leaving choices to chance. That was her way, her Tao.

Or was she? I was fictionalizing her. I was novelizing her. Such was my nature! When I met vivid people I put highlighted hybridized versions of them into stories.

"Did you hear that scary noise in the woods, Shar?"

"Sure, but it's only a distraction. Do you realize what we're doing, Swallow? We're spinning lines of color, we're winding those round each

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other in a pattern. So we're negating or enhancing each other. We're adding or subtracting. Final result? Blackness or whiteness. I guess the guy who goes black first is out of the game. Hell of a lot of these paths, by the way! Can't chat all day. Must be going." Shar sallied towards blue.

The moment I set foot on the path Shar had come by, I felt an itch of wrongness; so I turned on to the leftward arc instead. This felt more suitable. Maybe I should fictionalize myself! Maybe I should let a flow of narrative sweep me in the best direction! Perhaps I'd been doing so unwittingly in all the previous games? This was *my* way, my Tao.

I allowed myself to hear another grumble in the woods. Naturally I soon crossed into another color, which proved to be violet, a gloomily aching zone after the dazzle of yellow. At the next crossroads I met another player. Buck Henderson saluted me ironically.

"You're blue, I'm red, and I meet you in violet. That figures. Next I got to meet Freyda in an orange zone, since Freyda's yellow. Which way to orange, Swallow? Do you know?"

I shook my head.

"Ah, but are you lying or telling me the truth?"

"Doesn't it pay for us all to cooperate?" I asked him.

"That only applies if Mirrion can be wiped out *prior* to the final game. Otherwise it pays to fox the other human players."

"But by doing *that*—"

"Yeah," he sighed, "I contribute to Mirrion's survival. Meanwhile I need to assess which of us is the best one to face Mirrion in that final round—for the sake of our whole planetary future, man."

"And that one might be you? I vote we cooperate."

"Do your characters all cooperate in your books?"

"There's a higher sort of cooperation: the pattern of the story, the appropriate mosaic—"

"So who have you met with up until now, Swallow?"

"Just Shar," I said truthfully. I told him where she had come from, where she went.

"Hmm, so it's a two-layer problem. If you actually met Shar, did she tell you the truth? And are you telling the truth about what she said? Look, I'll trade information anyway. While I was cutting through green I met Chandler Brennan. And," he added, with the tone of a gambler raising the stake, "I saw Mirrion heading away out of red in the opposite direction to the one I chose. See you, Swallow. Maybe!" The general continued on along the path I'd come by.

I walked briskly on through violet, through green. Arcing woodland paths continued to cut across each other. I was tempted to halt for a while in the green. Such an appropriate hue for a woodland! A home

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base! However, Shar hadn't been wooed. Even when the verdant glades suddenly turned a wrong color she hadn't backtracked.

So many paths. Sometimes three paths crossed, offering me six choices. There had to be more than just one zone per color. As on a world map, several greens, several reds. I already knew what Freyda would say when I met her in orange.

"It's an information system, this, Swallow. It's a code, a language—" Freyda was slight, flat-chested, with large dark waiflike eyes. Her fingernails were bitten ragged. She was also a criminal, an accomplished and compulsive computer-rapist, not to be underestimated or patronized. I told her about Buck Henderson's truth-games.

She frowned. "No no no. This is an algorithm made of colors instead of zeroes and ones, more like the genetic code. That growling in the woods is an interceptor program. Sooner or later it'll show itself. It'll block the true path when I'm getting close. By then I'll know the password sequence. Or at least I can make a damn good guess—"

Later, in a blue zone, Brennan sprang a surprise. Swarthy complexion, curly brown hair, and soft hazel eyes which could harden, harden; a five hundred dollar suit, maroon leather shoes. His arms were unusually long. He pushed me unceremoniously in the chest, off the path, up against a tree. I smelled peppermint on his breath. His eau de cologne was jasmine cut with hot steel.

"Listen carefully, Swallow. Thirty grand suit you? That's what I'll pay for you to use the route I tell you. I have a plan. Plan doesn't involve *your* downfall, you have my word."

"Whose, then?"

He wagged a finger in front of my face. "Loser's, of course."

"You must be panicking."

Eyes turning to stone, he shook me. Violence! Aggression! This was part of the flow of my story: the jagged boulder against which my stream of narrative broke, shattering into gobbets of spume before re-uniting and moving onward coherently again. Brennan dictated a series of left turns, right turns, color zones.

"And what if I stray?" I asked.

"I'll know about *that*—as soon as the wrong person loses."

"Have you been browbeating any other players today, Mr. Brennan?"

He laughed. "If so, how would I know it was *you* who strayed? Soon as I learned you were involved in these games, Brennan Enterprises bought into publishing. I control your livelihood."

"You couldn't, so quickly."

"Think not? Publishers are peanuts. Brennan subsidiaries swallowed half a dozen. We have excellent lawyers, Swallow; could tie you up in knots for the rest of your days."

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"Why me? You couldn't have guessed I'd last this far."

He smirked. "Do you suppose I didn't set up useful handles on as *many* people as I could?"

"Oh, I see. Shar must have been easy to lean on . . ." I was sorry to learn that our lady monk had been bought—though maybe Shar adopted a random policy toward obeying Brennan? One to six: play it his way; seven to twelve, screw him! "But not a Pentagon General—or a hacker who was already up to her eyeballs in trouble? So which are you targeting as the loser this time? Freyda . . . or Buck?"

"You don't need to know, *yet*."

"If you and Mirrion end up as the last survivors—and I presume that's the idea!—why should I care a hoot which publishers you own?"

"Fame is the spur, Swallow. You wouldn't wish all your life's work to vanish from public view. Double oblivion."

"How could that happen?"

"Distribution problems, contract problems, any number of ways. Perhaps you'd be sued for plagiarism or libel . . . constantly. Big fish in little pond, you would fade."

"The same as I'll fade into interspace if you win!"

"I suspect that once that happens all *our* captured players will pop back into existence. So why worry? I'm doing us all a service. Whereas if *Mirrion* wins . . .!"

Blue was exerting a soporific effect upon me. I listened sleepily as Brennan once again recited the sequence of turns and colors; repeated this back to him. He released me, and I headed for red, a zone that reminded me of a night-house in a zoo, illuminated at a wavelength that wouldn't startle nocturnal animals. I imagined bats detaching themselves from the trees, flapping from bough to bough. Red was a broody zone, restful on the eye yet quietly passionate.

Thinking back on my meeting with the businessman, I decided that the encounter had been . . . dramatically *fitting*. But was I really going to let Chandler Brennan take over my own story, become the author of my actions?

Each in our own way, we players were reacting according to our own predispositions, weren't we? To Shar this mindscape was the setting for a role-playing game. To Henderson it was a matrix of truth-values. Freyda was attempting to penetrate a program, to worm her way through it. Brennan sought to buy a prime position.

We were reacting, but we weren't *imposing* our world views! Now that there were fewer of us, this was so much more obvious.

I decided then and there to impose my own view. Screw Brennan. Around the very next bend I would come across a picnic table and benches set out in a red glade. And upon that table there would be . . .

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I rounded the bend and quit the path to sit on a bench. I studied the open pack of Sobranie from which six had already been taken.

Carefully I removed the four cigarettes remaining on the top row and discarded those. In the red light those on the bottom row were red and orange and black, and I couldn't recall the original order, but that didn't matter. That lower row must be an exact repeat, the five colors nestling two by two. In my novels I never permitted characters to smoke. If a character smokes cigarettes, so as to be consistent said character should smoke frequently. Absurd billows of smoke would soon cloud the action. I took an orange Sobranie and lit it with my Zippo; inhaled, blew out.

The zone switched color. The glade, the sky glared yellow at me.

I lit another cigarette, a third. Four, five, all at once. I was Pan playing his pipes, five tubes poised between my index and second fingers.

All the colors of the spectrum flooded back, full technicolor. The grass was green, the sky was blue, the sun was yellow. The colors of each cocktail cigarette were true. I took a second rose-madder cigarette—for Mirrion or for Buck. My lips stretched into a smile to accommodate six golden filter-tips. As I sucked, dizzying myself, colors spun kaleidoscopically. Swirls of white appeared like snow in a whirlwind. By mixing the hues of light I could whiten the whole scene.

I already knew that I had won this game. Yet I could do more. I could stub out colors one by one till finally the world went black and disappeared. The woods thundered distantly as if hooves were racing towards me, pounding the turf. Which should I stub first, which last?

Shar hove into view, as if I had sent a smoke signal out to her. She was panting, sweating. My cigarettes were burning down, all slightly different lengths.

"Do I stub red first or last to banish Mirrion?" I asked her. "Quickly, tell me which."

Her eyes glazed. She was throwing a die in her mind, a five-sided die.

"Red first—*and* last! Thus you complete the circuit!"

I crushed out red. Yellow. Violet. Colors vanished. I stubbed green. Shar moaned, but still she stood her ground. I stomped blue, and a pang passed through me. The whole world turned red.

I extinguished the last cigarette of all.

I sat alone at the oak table in the hotel suite, the only player, all on my own. Mirrion's fur cloak lay draped over a nearby chair. No other sign of the alien. The packet of Sobranie was missing. I poured a glass of water, and drank; drummed my fingers. I heard the egg-whisk noise of a helicopter. Crossing to the louvers, I peered: at cars and vans moving along streets beyond the government cordon. The sun baked the distant scrubby desert, thin mirages shimmering, phantom streams.

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Returning, I seized the black cloak and donned it. I knew all at once how exactly to will the lost players to return from interspace.

"Quiet!" I told the reassembled gang. Some early losers looked on the verge of hysteria. Others were meditative; might catatonic be a better description? Buck Henderson grinned at me; Brennan scowled. Shar regarded her neighbors smugly; she'd been in on the endgame, hadn't she?

I smoothed the cloak around me, the cloak that let me do things. Why had we assumed that an alien machine must look like a machine? Because the brain-nets had been identifiable, nameable. This cloak was also a machine, though its full potential still eluded me.

"I'm going to bring Mirrion back," I announced. "We shall all see its true body." That was the next necessary event, wasn't it?

"No, I forbid it," objected Wilcock, the National Security agent. "We need to debrief you in depth first, Mr. Swallow. We have the alien stalemated. Checkmated. You don't just release it on a whim."

"I can put you back into interspace," I told the agent, and he shuddered. Could I do so? I didn't know. Could I recall Mirrion if a member of our coven was missing? No, I wasn't summoning a *demon*. . . . I was recovering an alien from storage outside of normal spacetime.

"Let him play it his own way," said Henderson. "Did all right so far, didn't he?"

I concentrated and . . . one moment absent, one moment there. Mirrion returned to the seat where my cloak had lain. The bald mannequin's head sat upon a body that seemed to be a patchwork concoction, a cocktail of species. Its shoulders were human enough, but one side of its chest was armored in yellow scales like some exotic skin disease, while a mass of blue feathers coated the opposite part. One arm was a slim, jointed black tube plunging into the three-fingered glove. The other, a segmented brown tentacle, a great earthworm. That was the arm it had kept concealed. Its belly section was flexible gray gristle speckled with red spots. I couldn't see Mirrion's legs yet.

The alien was . . . living heraldry. Its body was augmented with parts of other species whom I guessed it had played against. And beaten—or welcomed into the cosmos? Were those biological replacement parts by way of being battle honors—or carnal badges of cosmic virtue? What exactly had I exposed: the good news, or the bad? For sure, in no book had I ever invented anything remotely similar.

"Your move," wheezed Mirrion.

Was the game not finished?

"Be very careful," warned Wilcock. Carl Martinez began to giggle rhythmically—"hee! hee! hee!"—as if he was afflicted with hiccups. Maybe he was engaged in some shamanic breathing exercise.

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"Don't forget the pay-off," whispered Buck Henderson. "Path to the stars."

Shar was beaming at me greasily; Freyda played cat's cradle with her nibbled fingers.

"So," I said to Mirrion, "you like to *partake* of the species you play with?"

Those blue eyes stared at me intently; the rose-bud lips stayed pursed.

"I should have thought you would revert afterward, not carry on wearing alien body bits? I should have thought the *head* would figure most prominently in any culture?"

Mirrion nodded its head.

"So you would wear the heads of alien species during games, not an arm or a leg."

Interspace, I thought: a region where players could be stored out of sight, outside of reality; from which they could be recovered. . . . Surely I was making some obvious wrong assumption about Mirrion?

"Anyone got a cigarette?" I asked. "No, wait . . ." I concentrated, and before me on the table lay the open, by now almost empty box of Sobranie. I chose blue, and lit up.

Mirrion's mannequin head regarded me—apprehensively? with resignation? And I knew my error. We had all been assuming that Mirrion existed; that Mirrion was an individual. But Mirrion *wasn't.*

"Mirrion," I said, "will you kindly move well clear of the table?"

With an emphysemic sigh, Mirrion complied. One leg was green, scaly-skinned, the other lovely, smooth, golden, double-jointed. Both feet were enclosed in matching yellow socks with tough soles.

Mirrion stood passively, looking sad, as I went to it. I placed both hands upon its human shoulders. "Goodbye," I said. "Well played." The pseudo-human eyes each squeezed out a tear. I exerted the power of the cloak and backed away.

The human head shrank and sank out of sight, as if rotating away from our viewpoint. Mirrion's trunk and arms and legs expanded, distorted, ruptured—into half a dozen, seven swelling figures disentangling from one another, moving apart, filling out, stepping forth from interspace to join up with the arm or leg or chest segment which had been present all along—fixed together in the composite body which had been Mirrion.

Somebody squealed, and somebody fainted . . . as seven different aliens joined us in the suite. One was avian, blue-feathered. Another, reptilian. A third was a stooping, joined black insect. A fourth was a writhing columnar knot of brown tentacles. A fifth was a golden humanoid. . . .

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All but the column of tentacles wore soft transparent helmets and what could have been garments or items of apparatus.

It is my human arm, hidden by our cloak, that places the empty ceramic bottles on the little dais beneath the bio-lights as the focus for the first game. Such bottles possess an inside and an outside but only one continuous surface. Around the dais, under the mosaic dome, eleven furry brown simoids kneel on tasseled cushions, wearing brain-nets. Through the big glossy eyes in the furry brown head of the new Mirrion I can watch the simoids, through its pointy hairy ears hear them, while in a pocket of interspace the majority of our eight-fold body floats in close harmony, bonded at our point of intersection, Mirrion.

Mirrion whispers in the alien language, and I understand that it is asking, "Shall we start?"

Yes, we shall start, and we shall subtract players one by one. Will one of the clever simoids win Mirrion's cloak; and will they discover us at last? So close to them, so far away?

What a distance I have come; though how swiftly in the globe-ship, learning to know my new companions, fully occupied with my new role, my fiction come to life. The ship rolled through level-prime of interspace. Now I am in the meta-level, helping test another newly discovered bright species. I'm masked in interspace, playing, while Earth's new globe-ships go out to the stars. How I wish Shar was here. I miss her solidity.

She might tell me why I still smell the odor of those cocktail cigarettes. ●

THE WALL OF STORMS

In the eye of the Red Spot,
in the absolute calm heart of the
continent-wide maelstrom of Jupiter
lives the only sapient Jovian race.
Vast dirigible beings gently float,
nourished by ammonia clouds
dreaming of worlds beyond
the wall of storms.

—Scott E. Green

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A HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

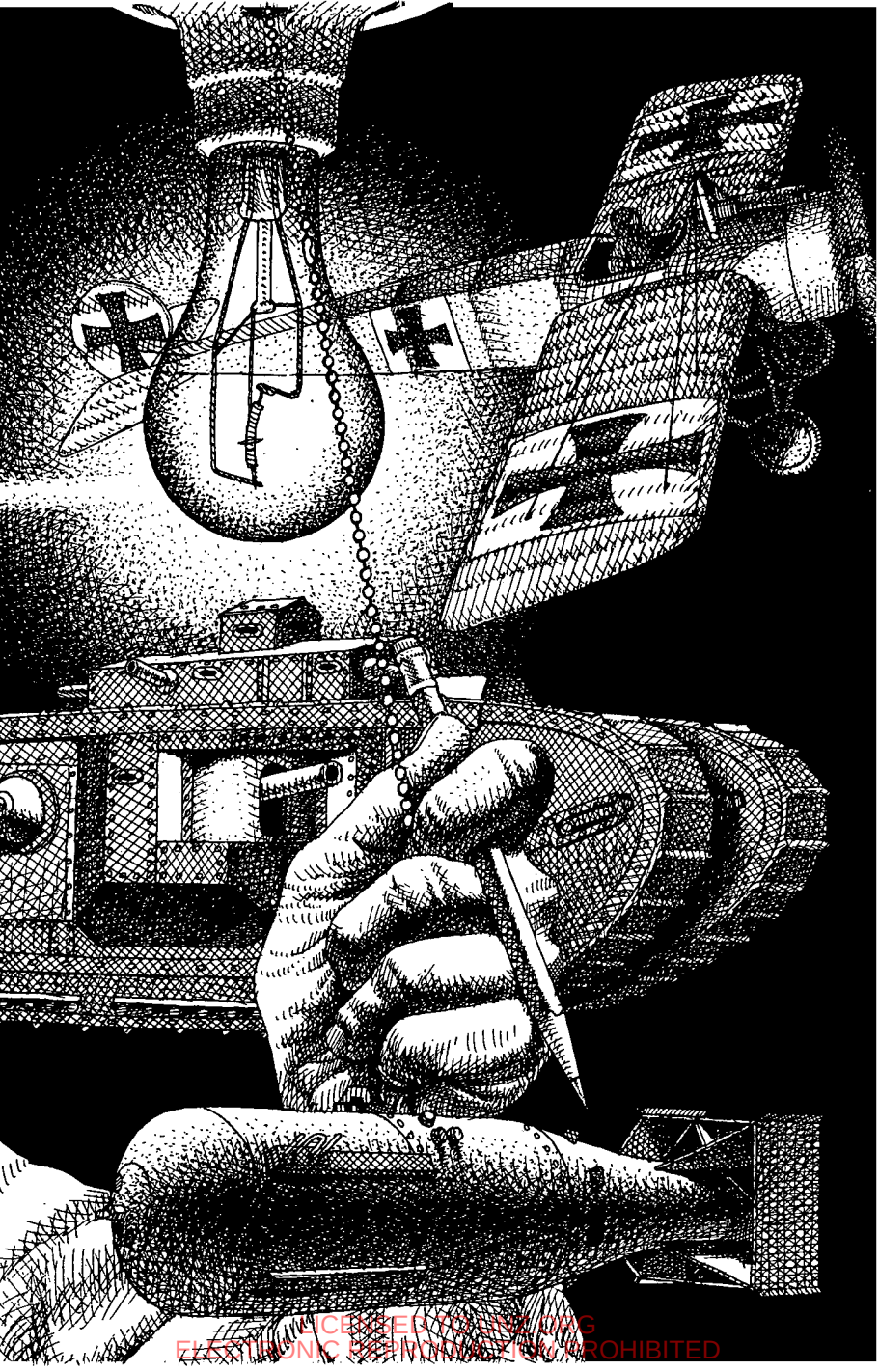
by Kim Stanley Robinson

In Kim Stanley Robinson's thoughtful new story, the events of the twentieth century cast their shadow upon the next one hundred years. The paperback edition of Mr. Robinson's most recent novel, *Pacific Coast*, has just been released by Tor Books.



art: Terry Lee

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"If truth is not to be found on the shelves of the British Museum, where, I asked myself, picking up a notebook and a pencil, is truth?"
—Virginia Woolf

Daily doses of bright light markedly improve the mood of people suffering from depression, so every day at eight in the evening Frank Churchill went to the clinic on Park Avenue, and sat for three hours in a room illuminated with sixteen hundred watts of white light. This was not exactly like having the sun in the room, but it was bright—about the same as if sixteen bare lightbulbs hung from the ceiling. In this case the bulbs were probably long tubes, and they were hidden behind a sheet of white plastic, so it was the whole ceiling that glowed.

He sat at a table and doodled with a purple pen on a pad of pink paper. And then it was eleven and he was out on the windy streets, blinking as traffic lights swam in the gloom. He walked home to a room in the west Eighties. He would return to the clinic at five the next morning for a predawn treatment, but now it was time to sleep. He looked forward to that. He'd been on the treatment for three weeks, and he was tired. Though the treatment did seem to be working—as far as he could tell; improvement was supposed to average 20 percent a week, and he wasn't sure what that would feel like.

In his room the answering machine was blinking. There was a message from his agent, asking him to call immediately. It was now nearly midnight, but he pushbuttoned the number and his agent answered on the first ring.

"You have DSPS," Frank said to him.

"What? What?"

"Delayed sleep phase syndrome. I know how to get rid of it."

"Frank! Look, Frank, I've got a good offer for you."

"Do you have a lot of lights on?"

"What? Oh, yeah, say, how's that going?"

"I'm probably 60 percent better."

"Good, good. Keep at it. Listen, I've got something should help you a hundred percent. A publisher in London wants you to go over there and write a book on the twentieth century."

"What kind of book?"

"Your usual thing, Frank, but this time putting together the big picture. Reflecting on all the rest of your books, so to speak. They want to bring it out in time for the turn of the century, and go oversize, use lots of illustrations, big print run—"

"A coffee table book?"

"People'll want it on their coffee tables, sure, but it's not—"

"I don't want to write a coffee table book."

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"Frank—"

"What do they want, ten thousand words?"

"They want thirty thousand words, Frank. And they'll pay an eighty thousand pound advance."

That gave him pause.

"Why so much?"

"They're new to publishing, they come from computers and this is the kind of numbers they're used to. It's a different scale."

"That's for sure. I still don't want to do it."

"Frank, come on, you're the one for this! The only successor to Barbara Tuchman!" That was a blurb found on paperback editions of his work. "They want you in particular—I mean, Churchill on the twentieth century, ha ha. It's a natural."

"I don't want to do it."

"Come on, Frank. You could use the money, I thought you were having trouble with the payments—"

"Yeah yeah." Time for a different tack. "I'll think it over."

"They're in a hurry, Frank."

"I thought you said turn of the century!"

"I did, but there's going to be a lot of this kind of book then, and they want to beat the rush. Set the standard and then keep it in print for a few years. It'll be great."

"It'll be remaindered within a year. Remaindered before it even comes out, if I know coffee table books."

His agent sighed. "Come on, Frank. You can use the money. As for the book, it'll be as good as you make it, right? You've been working on this stuff your whole career, and here's your chance to sum up. And you've got a lot of readers, people will listen to you." Concern made him shrill: "Don't let what's happened get you so down that you miss an opportunity like this! Work is the best cure for depression anyway. And this is your chance to influence how we think about what's happened!"

"With a coffee table book?"

"God damn it, don't think of it that way!"

"How should I think of it?"

His agent took a deep breath, let it out, spoke very slowly. "Think of it as eighty thousand pounds, Frank."

His agent did not understand.

Nevertheless, the next morning as he sat under the bright white ceiling, doodling with a green pen on yellow paper, he decided to go to England. He didn't want to sit in that room anymore; it scared him, because he suspected it might not be working. He was not 60 percent better. And he didn't want to shift to drug therapy. They had found

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nothing wrong with his brain, no physical problems at all, and though that meant little, it did make him resistant to the idea of drugs. He had his reasons and he wanted his feelings!

The light room technician thought that this attitude was a good sign in itself. "Your serotonin level is normal, right? So it's not that bad. Besides London's a lot farther north than New York, so you'll pick up the light you lose here. And if you need more you can always head north again, right?"

He called Charles and Rya Dowland to ask if he could stay with them. It turned out they were leaving for Florida the next day, but they invited him to stay anyway; they liked having their flat occupied while they were gone. Frank had done that before, he still had the key on his keyring. "Thanks," he said. It would be better this way, actually. He didn't feel like talking.

So he packed his backpack, including camping gear with the clothes, and the next morning flew to London. It was strange how one traveled these days: he hopped in a cab outside his apartment, then shifted from one chamber to another for several hours, only stepping outdoors again when he emerged from the Camden tube station, some hundred yards from Charles and Rya's flat.

The ghost of his old pleasure brushed him as he crossed Camden High Street and walked by the cinema, listening to London's voices. This had been his method for years: come to London, stay with Charles and Rya until he found digs, do his research and writing at the British Museum, visit the used bookstores at Charing Cross, spend the evenings at Charles and Rya's, watching TV and talking. It had been that way for four books.

The flat was located above a butcher shop. Every wall in it was covered with stuffed bookshelves, and there were shelves nailed up over the toilet, the bath, and the head of the guest bed. In the unlikely event of an earthquake the guest would be buried in a hundred histories of London.

Frank threw his pack on the guest bed and went past the English poets downstairs. The living room was nearly filled by a table stacked with papers and books. The side street below was an open-air produce market, and he could hear the voices of the vendors as they packed up for the day. The sun hadn't set, though it was past nine; these late May days were already long. It was almost like still being in therapy.

He went downstairs and bought vegetables and rice, then went back up and cooked them. The kitchen windows were the color of sunset, and the little flat glowed, evoking its owners so strongly that it was almost as if they were there. Suddenly he wished they were.

After eating he turned on the CD player and put on some Handel. He opened the living room drapes and settled into Charles's armchair, a

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glass of Bulgarian wine in his hand, an open notebook on his knee. He watched salmon light leak out of the clouds to the north, and tried to think about the causes of the First World War.

In the morning he woke to the dull *thump thump thump* of frozen slabs of meat being rendered by an axe. He went downstairs and ate cereal while leafing through the *Guardian*, then took the tube to Tottenham Court Road and walked to the British Museum.

Because of *The Belle Epoque* he had already done his research on the pre-war period, but writing in the British Library was a ritual he didn't want to break; it made him part of a tradition, back to Marx and beyond. He showed his still-valid reader's ticket to a librarian and then found an empty seat in his usual row; in fact he had written much of *Entre Deux Guerres* in that very carrel, under the frontal lobes of the great skull dome. He opened a notebook and stared at the page. Slowly he wrote, *1900 to 1914*. Then he stared at the page.

His earlier book had tended to focus on the sumptuous excesses of the pre-war European ruling class, as a young and clearly leftist reviewer in the *Guardian* had rather sharply pointed out. To the extent that he had delved into the causes of the Great War, he had subscribed to the usual theory; that it had been the result of rising nationalism, diplomatic brinksmanship, and several deceptive precedents in the previous two decades. The Spanish-American War, the Russo-Japanese War, and the two Balkan wars had all remained localized and non-catastrophic; and there had been several incidents, the Moroccan affair and the like, that had brought the two great alliances to the brink, but not toppled them over. So when Austria-Hungary made impossible demands to Serbia after the assassination of Ferdinand, no one could have known that the situation would domino into the trenches and their slaughter.

History as accident. Well, no doubt there was a lot of truth in that. But now he found himself thinking of the crowds in the streets of all the major cities, cheering the news of the war's outbreak; of the disappearance of pacifism, which had seemed such a force; of, in short, the apparently unanimous support for war among the prosperous citizens of the European powers. Support for a war that had no real reason to be!

There was something irreducibly mysterious about that, and this time he decided he would admit it, and discuss it. That would require a consideration of the preceding century, the *Pax Europeana*; which in fact had been a century of bloody subjugation, the high point of imperialism, with most of the world falling to the great powers. These powers had prospered at the expense of their colonies, who had suffered in abject misery. Then the powers had spent their profits building weapons, and used the weapons on each other, and destroyed themselves.

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There was something weirdly just about that development, as when a mass murderer finally turns the gun on himself. Punishment, an end to guilt, an end to pain. Could that really explain it? While staying in Washington with his dying father, Frank had visited the Lincoln Memorial, and there on the right-hand wall had been Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, carved in capital letters with the commas omitted, an oddity which somehow added to the speech's Biblical massiveness, as when it spoke of the ongoing war: "YET IF GOD WILLS THAT IT CONTINUE UNTIL ALL THE WEALTH PILED BY THE BONDSMAN'S TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF UNREQUITED TOIL SHALL BE SUNK AND UNTIL EVERY DROP OF BLOOD DRAWN WITH THE LASH SHALL BE PAID BY ANOTHER DRAWN WITH THE SWORD AS WAS SAID THREE THOUSAND YEARS AGO SO STILL IT MUST BE SAID 'THE JUDGMENTS OF THE LORD ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS ALTOGETHER.' "

A frightening thought, from that dark part of Lincoln that was never far from the surface. But as a theory of the Great War's origin it still struck him as inadequate. It was possible to believe it of the kings and presidents, the generals and diplomats, the imperial officers around the world; they had known what they were doing, and so might have been impelled by unconscious guilt to mass suicide. But the common citizen at home, ecstatic in the streets at the outbreak of general war? That seemed more likely to be just another manifestation of the hatred of the other. All my problems are your fault! He and Andrea had said that to each other a lot. Everyone did.

And yet . . . it still seemed to him that the causes were eluding him, as they had everyone else. Perhaps it was a simple pleasure in destruction. What is the primal response to an edifice? Knock it down. What is the primal response to a stranger? Attack him.

But he was losing his drift, falling away into the metaphysics of "human nature." That would be a constant problem in an essay of this length. And whatever the causes, there stood the year 1914, irreducible, inexplicable, unchangeable. "AND THE WAR CAME."

In his previous books he had never written about the wars. He was among those who believed that real history occurred in peacetime, and that in war you might as well roll dice or skip ahead to the peace treaty. For anyone but a military historian, what was interesting would begin again only when the war ended.

Now he wasn't so sure. Current views of the Belle Epoque were distorted because one only saw it through the lens of the war that ended it; which meant that the Great War was somehow more powerful than the Belle Epoque, or at least more powerful than he had thought. It

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seemed he would have to write about it, this time, to make sense of the century. And so he would have to research it.

He walked up to the central catalog tables. The room darkened as the sun went behind clouds, and he felt a chill.

For a long time the numbers alone staggered him. To overwhelm trench defenses, artillery bombardments of the most astonishing size were brought to bear: on the Somme the British put a gun every twenty yards along a fourteen-mile front, and fired a million and a half shells. In April 1917 the French fired six million shells. The Germans' Big Bertha shot shells seventy-five miles high, essentially into space. Verdun was a "battle" that lasted ten months, and killed almost a million men.

The British section of the front was ninety miles long. Every day of the war, about seven thousand men along that front were killed or wounded—not in any battle in particular, but just as the result of incidental sniper fire or bombardment. It was called "wastage."

Frank stopped reading, his mind suddenly filled with the image of the Vietnam Memorial. He had visited it right after leaving the Lincoln Memorial, and the sight of all those names engraved on the black granite plates had powerfully affected him. For a moment it had seemed possible to imagine all those people, a little white line for each.

But at the end of every month or two of the Great War, the British had had a whole Vietnam Memorial's worth of dead. Every month, for fifty-one months.

He filled out book request slips and gave them to the librarians in the central ring of desks, then picked up the books he had requested the day before, and took them back to his carrel. He skimmed the books and took notes, mostly writing down figures and statistics. British factories produced two hundred and fifty million shells. The major battles all killed a half million or more. About ten million men died on the field of battle, ten million more by revolution, disease, and starvation.

Occasionally he would stop reading and try to write; but he never got far. Once he wrote several pages on the economy of the war. The organization of agriculture and business, especially in Germany under Rathenau and England under Lloyd George, reminded him very strongly of the postmodern economy now running things. One could trace the roots of late capitalism to Great War innovations found in Rathenau's *Kriegsrohstoffabteilung* (the "War Raw Stuff Department"), or in his *Zentral Einkaufs-Gesellschaft*. All business had been organized to fight the enemy; but when the war was over and the enemy vanquished, the organization remained. People continued to sacrifice the fruits of their work,

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but now they did it for the corporations that had taken the wartime governments' positions in the system.

So much of the twentieth century, there already in the Great War. And then the Armistice was signed, at eleven A.M. on November 11, 1918. That morning at the front the two sides exchanged bombardments as usual, so that by eleven A.M. many people had died.

That evening Frank hurried home, just beating a thundershower. The air was as dark as smoky glass.

And the war never ended.

This idea, that the two world wars were actually one, was not original to him. Winston Churchill said it at the time, as did the Nazi Alfred Rosenburg. They saw the twenties and thirties as an interregnum, a pause to regroup in the middle of a two-part conflict. The eye of a hurricane.

Nine o'clock one morning and Frank was still at the Dowlands', lingering over cereal and paging through the *Guardian*, and then through his notebooks. Every morning he seemed to get a later start, and although it was May, the days didn't seem to be getting any longer. Rather the reverse.

There were arguments against the view that it was a single war. The twenties did not seem very ominous, at least after the Treaty of Locarno in 1925: Germany had survived its financial collapse, and everywhere economic recovery seemed strong. But the thirties showed the real state of things: the Depression, the new democracies falling to fascism, the brutal Spanish Civil War; the starvation of the kulaks; the terrible sense of fatality in the air. The sense of slipping on a slope, falling helplessly back into war.

But this time it was different. *Total War.* German military strategists had coined the phrase in the 1890s, while analyzing Sherman's campaign in Georgia. And they felt they were waging total war when they torpedoed neutral ships in 1915. But they were wrong; the Great War was not total war. In 1914 the rumor that German soldiers had killed eight Belgian nuns was enough to shock all civilization, and later when the *Lusitania* was sunk, objections were so fierce that the Germans agreed to leave passenger ships alone. This could only happen in a world where people still held the notion that in war armies fought armies and soldiers killed soldiers, while civilians suffered privation and perhaps got killed accidentally, but were never deliberately targeted. This was how European wars had been fought since the Renaissance: diplomacy by other means.

In 1939, this changed. Perhaps it changed only because the capability for total war had emerged from the technological base, in the form of

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mass long-range aerial bombardment. Perhaps on the other hand it was a matter of learning the lessons of the Great War, digesting its implications. Stalin's murder of the kulaks, for instance: five million Ukrainian peasants, killed because Stalin wanted to collectivize agriculture. Food was deliberately shipped out of that breadbasket region, emergency supplies withheld, hidden stockpiles destroyed; and several thousand villages disappeared as all their occupants starved. This was total war.

Every morning Frank leafed around in the big catalogue volumes, as if he might find some other twentieth century. He filled out his slips, picked up the books requested the previous day, took them back to his carrel. He spent more time reading than writing. The days were cloudy, and it was dim under the great dome. His notes were getting scrambled. He had stopped working in chronological order, and kept returning compulsively to the Great War, even though the front wave of his reading was well into World War Two.

Twenty million had died in the first war, fifty million in the second. Civilian deaths made the bulk of the difference. Near the end of the war, thousands of bombs were dropped on cities in the hope of starting firestorms, in which the atmosphere itself was in effect ignited, as in Dresden, Berlin, Tokyo. Civilians were the target now, and strategic bombing made them easy to hit. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were in that sense a kind of exclamation point, at the end of a sentence which the war had been saying all along: we will kill your families at home. War is war, as Sherman said; if you want peace, surrender. ! And they did.

After two bombs. Nagasaki was bombed three days after Hiroshima, before the Japanese had time to understand the damage and respond. Dropping the bomb on Hiroshima was endlessly debated in the literature, but Frank found few who even attempted a defense of Nagasaki. Truman and his advisors did it, people said, to a) show Stalin they had more than one bomb, and b) show Stalin that they would use the bomb even as a threat or warning only, as Nagasaki demonstrated. A Vietnam Memorial's worth of civilians in an instantaneous flash, just so Stalin would take Truman seriously. Which he did.

When the crew of the *Enola Gay* landed, they celebrated with a barbecue.

In the evenings Frank sat in the Dowland flat in silence. He did not read, but watched the evening summer light leak out of the sky to the north. The days were getting shorter. He needed the therapy, he could feel it. More light! Someone had said that on their deathbed—Newton, Galileo, Spinoza, someone like that. No doubt they had been depressed at the time.

He missed Charles and Rya. He would feel better, he was sure, if he had them there to talk with. That was the thing about friends, after all: they lasted and you could talk. That was the definition of friendship.

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But Charles and Rya were in Florida. And in the dusk he saw that the walls of books in the flat functioned like lead lining in a radioactive environment, all those recorded thoughts forming a kind of shield against poisonous reality. The best shield available, perhaps. But now it was failing, at least for him; the books appeared to be nothing more than their spines.

And then one evening in a premature blue sunset it seemed that the whole flat had gone transparent, and that he was sitting in an armchair, suspended over a vast and shadowy city.

The Holocaust, like Hiroshima and Nagasaki, had precedents. Russians with Ukrainians, Turks with Armenians, white settlers with native Americans. But the mechanized efficiency of the Germans' murder of the Jews was something new and horrible. There was a book in his stack on the designers of the death camps, the architects, engineers, builders. Were these functionaries less or more obscene than the mad doctors, the sadistic guards? He couldn't decide.

And then there was the sheer number of them, the six million. It was hard to comprehend it. He read that there was a library in Jerusalem where they had taken on the task of recording all they could find about every one of the six million. Walking up Charing Cross Road that afternoon he thought of that and stopped short. All those names in one library, another transparent room, another memorial. For a second he caught a glimpse of how many people that was, a whole London's worth. Then it faded and he was left on a street corner, looking both ways to make sure he didn't get run over.

As he continued walking he tried to calculate how many Vietnam Memorials it would take to list the six million. Roughly two per hundred thousand; thus twenty per million. So, one hundred and twenty. Count them one by one, step by step.

He took to hanging out through the evenings in pubs. The Wellington was as good as any, and was frequented occasionally by some acquaintances he had met through Charles and Rya. He sat with them and listened to them talk, but often he found himself distracted by his day's reading. So the conversations tumbled along without him, and the Brits, slightly more tolerant than Americans of eccentricity, did not make him feel unwelcome.

The pubs were noisy and filled with light. Scores of people moved about in them, talking, smoking, drinking. A different kind of lead-lined room. He didn't drink beer, and so at first remained sober; but then he discovered the hard cider that pubs carried. He liked it and drank it like the others drank their beer, and got quite drunk. After that he sometimes became very talkative, telling the rest things about the twentieth century that they already knew, and they would nod and contribute some other bit of information, to be polite, then change the subject back to whatever they had been discussing before, gently and without snubbing him.

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But most of the time when he drank he only got more remote from their talk, which jumped about faster than he could follow. And each morning after, he would wake late and slow, head pounding, the day already there and a lot of the morning light missed in sleep. Depressives were not supposed to drink at all. So finally he quit going to the Wellington, and instead ate at the pubs closest to the Dowlands'. One was called The Halfway House, the other World's End, a poor choice as far as names were concerned, but he ate at World's End anyway, and afterward would sit at a corner table and nurse a whisky and stare at page after page of notes, chewing the end of a pen to plastic shrapnel.

The Fighting Never Stopped, as one book's title put it. But the atomic bomb meant that the second half of the century looked different than the first. Some called it the *Pax Americana*—Americans, for the most part. But most called it the Cold War, 1945-1989. And not that cold, either. Under the umbrella of the superpower stalemate local conflicts flared everywhere, wars which compared to the two big ones looked small; but there had been over a hundred of them all told, killing about 350,000 people a year, for a total of around fifteen million, some said twenty; it was hard to count. Most occurred in the big ten: the two Vietnam wars, the two Indo-Pakistan wars, the Korean war, the Algerian war, the civil war in Sudan, the massacres in Indonesia in 1965, the Biafran war, and the Iran-Iraq war. Then another ten million civilians had been starved by deliberate military action; so that the total for the period was about the equal of the Great War itself. Though it had taken ten times as long to compile. Improvement of a sort.

And thus perhaps the rise of atrocity war, as if the horror of individualized murders could compensate for the lack of sheer number. And maybe it could; because now his research consisted of a succession of accounts and color photos of rape, dismemberment, torture—bodies of individual people, in their own clothes, scattered on the ground in pools of blood. Vietnamese villages, erupting in napalm. Cambodia, Uganda, Tibet—Tibet was genocide again, paced to escape the world's notice, a few villages destroyed every year in a process called *thamzing*, or re-education: the villages seized by the Chinese and the villagers killed by a variety of methods, "burying alive, hanging, beheading, disembowling, scalding, crucifixion, quartering, stoning, small children forced to shoot their parents; the pregnant women given forced abortions, the fetuses piled in mounds on the village squares."

Meanwhile power on the planet continued to shift into fewer hands. The Second World War had been the only thing to successfully end the Depression, a fact leaders remembered; so the economic consolidation begun in the First War continued through the Second War and the Cold War, yoking the whole world into a war economy.

At first 1989 had looked like a break away from that. But now, just seven years later, the Cold War losers all looked like Germany in 1922,

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their money worthless, their shelves empty, their democracies crumbling to juntas. Except this time the juntas had corporate sponsors; multinational banks ran the old Soviet bloc just as they did the Third World, with "austerity measures" enforced in the name of "the free market," meaning half the world went to sleep hungry every night to pay off debts to millionaires. While temperatures still rose, populations still soared, "local conflicts" still burned in twenty different places.

One morning Frank lingered over cereal, reluctant to leave the flat. He opened the *Guardian* and read that the year's defense budgets worldwide would total around a trillion dollars. "More light," he said, swallowing hard. It was a dark, rainy day. He could feel his pupils enlarging, making the effort. The days were surely getting shorter, even though it was May; and the air was getting darker, as if London's Victorian fogs had returned, coal smoke in the fabric of reality.

He flipped the page and started an article on the conflict in Sri Lanka. Singalhese and Tamils had been fighting for a generation now, and some time in the previous week, a husband and wife had emerged from their house in the morning to find the heads of their six sons arranged on their lawn. He threw the paper aside and walked through soot down the streets.

He got to the British Museum on automatic pilot. Waiting for him at the top of the stack was a book containing estimates of total war deaths for the century. About a hundred million people.

He found himself on the dark streets of London again, thinking of numbers. All day he walked, unable to gather his thoughts. And that night as he feel asleep the calculations returned, in a dream or a hypnogogic vision: it would take two thousand Vietnam Memorials to list the century's war dead. From above he saw himself walking the Mall in Washington DC; and the whole park from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial was dotted with the black Vs of Vietnam Memorials, as if a flock of giant stealth birds had landed on it. All night he walked past black wing walls, moving west toward the white tomb on the river.

The next day the first book on the stack concerned the war between China and Japan, 1931-1945. Like most of Asian history this war was poorly remembered in the West, but it had been huge. The whole Korean nation became in effect a slave labor camp in the Japanese war effort, and the Japanese concentration camps in Manchuria had killed as many Chinese as the Germans had killed Jews. These deaths included thousands in the style of Mengele and the Nazi doctors, caused by "scientific" medical torture. Japanese experimenters had for instance performed transfusions in which they drained Chinese prisoners of their blood and replaced it with horses' blood, to see how long the prisoners would live. Survival rates varied from twenty minutes to six hours, with the subjects in agony throughout.

Frank closed that book and put it down. He picked the next one out of the gloom and peered at it. A heavy old thing, bound in dark green

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leather, with a dull gold pattern inlaid on the spine and boards. *A History of the Nineteenth Century, with Illustrations*—the latter tinted photos, their colors faded and dim. Published in 1902 by George Newnes Ltd.; last century's equivalent of his own project, apparently. Curiosity about that had caused him to request the title. He opened it and thumbed through, and on the last page the text caught his eye: "I believe that Man is good. I believe that we stand at the dawn of a century that will be more peaceful and prosperous than any in history."

He put down the book and left the British Museum. In a red phone booth he located the nearest car rental agency, an Avis outlet near Westminster. He took the tube and walked to the agency, and there he rented a blue Ford Sierra station wagon. The steering wheel was on the right, of course. Frank had never driven in Great Britain before, and he sat behind the wheel trying to hide his uneasiness from the agent. The clutch, brake, and gas pedal were left-to-right as usual, thank God. And the gear shift was arranged the same, though one did have to operate it with the left hand.

Awkwardly he shoved the gearshift into first and drove out of the garage, turning left and driving down the left side of the street. It was weird. But the oddness of sitting on the right insured that he wouldn't forget the necessity of driving on the left. He pulled to the curb and perused the Avis street map of London, plotted a course, got back in traffic, and drove to Camden High Street. He parked below the Dowlands' and went upstairs and packed, then took his backpack down to the car. He returned to leave a note: *Gone to the land of the midnight sun.* Then he went down to the car and drove north, onto the highways and out of London.

It was a wet day, and low full clouds brushed over the land, dropping here a black broom of rain, there a Blakean shaft of sunlight. The hills were green, and the fields yellow or brown or lighter green. At first there were a lot of hills, a lot of fields. Then the highway swung by Birmingham and Manchester, and he drove by fields of rowhouses, line after line after line of them, on narrow treeless streets—all orderly and neat, and yet still among the bleakest human landscapes he had ever seen. Streets like trenches. Certainly the world was being overrun. Population densities must be near the levels set in those experiments on rats which had caused the rats to go insane. It was as good an explanation as any. Mostly males affected, in both cases: territorial hunters, bred to kill for food, now trapped in little boxes. They had gone mad. "I believe that Man is this or that," the Edwardian author had written, and why not; it couldn't be denied that it was mostly men's doing. The planning, the diplomacy, the fighting, the raping, the killing.

The obvious thing to do was to give the running of the world over to women. There was Thatcher in the Falklands and Indira Gandhi in Bangladesh, it was true; but still it would be worth trying, it could hardly

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get worse! And given the maternal instinct, it would probably be better. Give every first lady her husband's job. Perhaps every woman her man's job. Let the men care for the children, for five thousand years or fifty thousand, one for every year of murderous patriarchy.

North of Manchester he passed giant radio towers, and something that looked like nuclear reactor stacks. Fighter jets zoomed overhead. The twentieth century. Why hadn't that Edwardian author been able to see it coming? Perhaps the future was simply unimaginable, then and always. Or perhaps things hadn't looked so bad in 1902. The Edwardian, looking forward in a time of prosperity, saw more of the same; instead there had followed a century of horrors. Now one looked forward from a time of horrors; so that by analogy, what was implied for the next century was grim beyond measure. And with the new technology of destruction, practically anything was possible: chemical warfare, nuclear terrorism, biological holocaust; victims killed by nano-assassins flying through them, or by viruses in their drinking supply, or by a particular ringing of their telephone; or reduced to zombies by drugs or brain implants, torture or nerve gas; or simply dispatched with bullets, or starved; hi tech, low tech, the methods were endless. And the motivations would be stronger than ever; with populations rising and resources depleted, people were going to be fighting not to rule, but to survive. Some little country threatened with defeat could unleash an epidemic against its rival and accidentally kill off a continent, or everyone, it was entirely possible. The twenty-first century might make the twentieth look like nothing at all.

He would come to after reveries like that and realize that twenty or thirty or even sixty miles had passed without him seeing a thing of the outside world. Automatic pilot, on roads that were reversed! He tried to concentrate.

He was somewhere above Carlisle. The map showed two possible routes to Edinburgh: one left the highway just below Glasgow, while a smaller road left sooner and was much more direct. He chose the direct route and took an exit into a roundabout and onto the A702, a two-lane road heading northeast. Its black asphalt was wet with rain, and the clouds rushing overhead were dark. After several miles he passed a sign that said "Scenic Route," which suggested he had chosen the wrong road, but he was unwilling to backtrack. It was probably as fast to go this way by now, just more work: frequent roundabouts, villages with traffic lights, and narrow stretches where the road was hemmed by hedges or walls. Sunset was near, he had been driving for hours; he was tired, and when black trucks rushed at him out of the spray and shadows it looked as if they were going to collide with him head-on. It became an effort to stay to the left rather than the right where his instincts shrieked he should be. Right and left had to be reversed on that level, but kept the same at foot level—reversed concerning which hand went on the gearshift, but not

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reversed for what the gearshift did—and it all began to blur and mix, until finally a huge lorry rushed head first at him and he veered left, but hit the gas rather than the brakes. At the unexpected lurch forward he swerved farther left to be safe, and that ran his left wheels off the asphalt and into a muddy gutter, causing the car to bounce back onto the road. He hit the brakes hard and the lorry roared by his ear. The car skidded over the wet asphalt to a halt.

He pulled over and turned on the emergency blinker. As he got out of the car he saw that the driver's side mirror was gone. There was nothing there but a rectangular depression in the metal, four rivet holes slightly flared to the rear, and one larger hole for the mirror adjustment mechanism, missing as well.

He went to the other side of the car to remind himself what the Sierra's side mirrors looked like. A solid metal and plastic mounting. He walked a hundred yards back down the road, looking through the dusk for the missing one, but he couldn't find it anywhere. The mirror was gone.

Outside Edinburgh he stopped and called Alec, a friend from years past.

"What? Frank Churchill? Hello! You're here? Come on by, then."

Frank followed his directions into the city center, past the train station to a neighborhood of narrow streets. Reversed parallel parking was almost too much for him; it took four tries to get the car next to the curb. The Sierra bumped over paving stones to a halt. He killed the engine and got out of the car, but his whole body continued to vibrate, a big tuning fork humming in the twilight. Shops threw their light over passing cars. Butcher, baker, Indian deli.

Alec lived on the third floor. "Come in, man, come in." He looked harried. "I thought you were in America! What brings you here?"

"I don't know."

Alec glanced sharply at him, then led him into the flat's kitchen and living area. The window had a view across rooftops to the castle. Alec stood in the kitchen, uncharacteristically silent. Frank put down his shoulder bag and walked over to look out at the castle, feeling awkward. In the old days he and Andrea had trained up several times to visit Alec and Suzanne, a primatologist. At that time those two had lived in a huge three-storied flat in the New Town, and when Frank and Andrea had arrived the four of them would stay up late into the night, drinking brandy and talking in a high-ceilinged Georgian living room. During one stay they had all driven into the Highlands, and another time Frank and Andrea had stayed through a festival week, the four attending as many plays as they could. But now Suzanne and Alec had gone their ways, and Frank and Andrea were divorced, and Alec lived in a different flat; and that whole life had disappeared.

"Did I come at a bad time?"

"No, actually." A clatter of dishes as Alec worked at the sink. "I'm off to dinner with some friends, you'll join us—you haven't eaten?"

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"No. I won't be—"

"No. You've met Peg and Rog before, I think. And we can use the distraction, I'm sure. We've all been to a funeral this morning. Friends of ours, their kid died. Crib death, you know."

"Jesus. You mean it just . . ."

"Sudden infant death syndrome, yeah. Dropped him off at the day care and he went off during his nap. Five months old."

"Jesus."

"Yeah." Alec went to the kitchen table and filled a glass from a bottle of Laphroaig. "Want a whisky?"

"Yes, please."

Alec poured another glass, drank his down. "I suppose the idea these days is that a proper funeral helps the parents deal with it. So Tom and Elyse came in carrying the coffin, and it was about this big." He held his hands a foot apart.

"No."

"Yeah. Never seen anything like it."

They drank in silence.

The restaurant was a fashionably bohemian seafood place, set above a pub. There Frank and Alec joined a group of five, Peg and Rog, another couple, and a woman named Karen. All animal behaviorists, and all headed out to Africa in the next couple of weeks—Rog and Peg to Tanzania, the rest to Rwanda. Despite their morning's event the talk was quick, spirited, wide-ranging; Frank drank wine and listened as they discussed African politics, the problems of filming primates, rock music. Only once did the subject of the funeral come up, and then they shook their heads; there wasn't much to say. Stiff upper lip.

Frank said, "I suppose it's better it happened now than when the kid was three or four."

They stared at him. "Oh no," Peg said. "I don't think so."

Acutely aware that he had said something stupid, he tried to recover: "I mean, you know, they've more time to . . ." He shook his head, foundering.

"It's rather comparing absolutes, isn't it," Rog said gently.

"True," he said. "It is." And he drank his wine. He wanted to go on: True, he wanted to say, any death is an absolute disaster, even that of an infant too young to know what was happening; but what if you had spent your life raising six such children and then went out one morning and found their heads on your lawn? Isn't the one more absolute than the other? He was drunk, his head hurt, his body still vibrated with the day's drive, and the shock of the brush with the lorry; and it seemed likely that the dyslexia of exhaustion had invaded all his thinking, including his moral sense, making everything backward. So he clamped his teeth together and concentrated on the wine, his fork humming in his hand, his glass chattering against his teeth. The room was dark.

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Afterward Alec stopped at the door to his building and shook his head. "Not ready for that yet," he said. "Let's try Preservation Hall, it's your kind of thing on Wednesday nights. Traditional jazz."

Frank and Andrea had been fans of traditional jazz. "Any good?"

"Good enough for tonight, eh?"

The pub was within walking distance, down a wide cobblestoned promenade called the Grassmarket, then up Victoria Street. At the door of the pub they were stopped; there was a cover charge, the usual band had been replaced by a buffet dinner and concert, featuring several different bands. Proceeds to go to the family of a Glasgow musician, recently killed in a car crash. "Jesus Christ," Frank exclaimed, feeling like a curse. He turned to go.

"Might as well try it," Alec said, and pulled out his wallet. "I'll pay."

"But we've already eaten."

Alec ignored him and gave the man twenty pounds. "Come on."

Inside, a very large pub was jammed with people, and an enormous buffet table stacked with meats, breads, salads, seafood dishes. They got drinks from the bar and sat at the end of a crowded picnic table. It was noisy, the Scots accents so thick Frank only understood half of what he heard. A succession of local acts took the stage: the traditional jazz band that usually played, a stand-up comedian, a singer of forties' music hall songs, a country-western group. Alec and Frank took turns going to the bar to get refills. Frank watched the bands and the crowd. All ages and types were represented. Each band said something about the late musician, who apparently had been well-known, a young rocker and quite a hellion from the sound of it. Crashed driving home drunk after a gig, and no one a bit surprised.

About midnight an obese young man seated at their table, who had been stealing food from all the plates around him, rose whalelike and surged to the stage. People cheered as he joined the band setting up. He picked up a guitar, leaned into the mike, and proceeded to rip into a selection of r&b and early rock and roll. He and his band were the best group yet, and the pub went wild. Most of the crowd got to their feet and danced in place. Next to Frank a young punk had to lean over the table to answer a gray-haired lady's questions about how he kept his hair spiked. A Celtic wake, Frank thought, and downed his cider and howled with the rest as the fat man started up Chuck Berry's "Rock And Roll Music."

So he was feeling no pain when the band finished its last encore and he and Alec staggered off into the night, and made their way home. But it had gotten a lot colder while they were inside, and the streets were dark and empty. Preservation Hall was no more than a small wooden box of light, buried in a cold stone city. Frank looked back in its direction and saw that a streetlight reflected off the black cobblestones of the Grassmarket in such a way that there were thousands of brief white squiggles underfoot, looking like names engraved on black granite, as if the whole surface of the earth were paved by a single memorial.

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The next day he drove north again, across the Forth Bridge and then west along the shores of a loch to Fort William, and north from there through the Highlands. Above Ullapool steep ridges burst like fins out of boggy treeless hillsides. There was water everywhere, from puddles to lochs, with the Atlantic itself visible from most high points. Out to sea one could see the tall islands of the Inner Hebrides.

He continued north. He had his sleeping bag and foam pad with him, and so he parked in a scenic overlook, and cooked soup on his Bluet stove, and slept in the back of the car. He woke with the dawn and drove north. He talked to nobody.

Eventually he reached the northwest tip of Scotland and was forced to turn east on a road bordering the North Sea. Early that evening he arrived in Scrabster, at the northeast tip of Scotland. He drove to the docks, and found that a ferry was scheduled to leave for the Orkney Islands the next day at noon. He decided to take it.

There was no secluded place to park, so he took a room in a hotel. He had dinner at the restaurant next door, fresh shrimp in mayonnaise with chips, and went to his room and slept. At six the next morning the ancient crone who ran the hotel knocked on his door and told him an unscheduled ferry was leaving in forty minutes: did he want to go? He said he did. He got up and dressed, then felt too exhausted to continue. He decided to take the regular ferry after all, took off his clothes and returned to bed. Then he realized that exhausted or not, he wasn't going to be able to fall back asleep. Cursing, almost crying, he got up and put his clothes back on. Downstairs the old woman had fried bacon and made him two thick bacon sandwiches, as he was going to miss her regular breakfast. He ate the sandwiches sitting in the Sierra, waiting to get the car into the ferry. Once in the hold he locked the car and went up to the warm stuffy passenger cabin, and lay on padded vinyl seating and fell back asleep.

He woke when they docked in Stromness. For a moment he didn't remember getting on the ferry, and he couldn't understand why he wasn't in his hotel bed in Scrabster. He stared through salt-stained windows at fishing boats, amazed, and then it came to him. He was in the Orkneys.

Driving along the southern coast of the main island, he found that his mental image of the Orkneys had been entirely wrong. He had expected an extension of the Highlands; instead it was like eastern Scotland, low, rounded, and green. Most of it was cultivated or used for pasture. Green fields, fences, farmhouses. He was a bit disappointed.

Then in the island's big town of Kirkwall he drove past a Gothic cathedral—a very little Gothic cathedral, a kind of pocket cathedral. Frank had never seen anything like it. He stopped and got out to have a look. Cathedral of St. Magnus, begun in 1137. So early, and this far north! No wonder it was so small. Building it would have required craftsmen from the continent, shipped up here to a rude fishing village of

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drywall and turf roofs; a strange influx it must have been, a kind of cultural revolution. The finished building must have stood out like something from another planet.

But as he walked around the bishop's palace next door, and then a little museum, he learned that it might not have been such a shock for Kirkwall after all. In those days the Orkneys had been a crossroads of a sort, where Norse and Scots and English and Irish had met, infusing an indigenous culture that went right back to the Stone Age. The fields and pastures he had driven by had been worked, some of them, for five thousand years!

And such faces walking the streets, so intent and vivid. His image of the local culture had been as wrong as his image of the land. He had thought he would find decrepit fishing villages, dwindling to nothing as people moved south to the cities. But it wasn't like that in Kirkwall, where teenagers roamed in self-absorbed talky gangs, and restaurants open to the street were packed for lunch. In the bookstores he found big sections on local topics: nature guides, archaeological guides, histories, sea tales, novels. Several writers, obviously popular, had as their entire subject the islands. To the locals, he realized, the Orkneys were the center of the world.

He bought a guidebook and drove north, to the neolithic site of Brodgar, Stenness, and Maes Howe. Brodgar and Stenness were two rings of standing stones; Maes Howe was a nearby chambered tomb.

The Ring of Brodgar was a big one, three hundred and forty feet across. Over half of the original sixty stones were still standing, each one a block of roughly dressed sandstone, weathered over the millennia into shapes of great individuality and charisma, like Rodin figures. Following the arc they made, he watched the sunlight break on them. It was beautiful.

Stenness was less impressive, as there were only four stones left, each tremendously tall. It roused more curiosity than awe: how had they stood those monsters on end? No one knew for sure.

From the road, Maes Howe was just a conical grass mound. To see the inside he had to wait for a guided tour, happily scheduled to start in fifteen minutes.

He was still the only person waiting when a short stout woman drove up in a pickup truck. She was about twenty-five, and wore Levis and a red windbreaker. She greeted him and unlocked a gate in the fence surrounding the mound, then led him up a gravel path to the entrance on the southwest slope. There they had to get on their knees and crawl, down a tunnel three feet high and some thirty feet long. Midwinter sunsets shone directly down this entryway, the woman looked over her shoulder to tell him. Her Levis were new.

The main chamber of the tomb was quite tall. "Wow," he said, standing up and looking around.

"It's big, isn't it," the guide said. She told him about it in a casual way. The walls were made of the ubiquitous sandstone slabs, with some mons-

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ter monoliths bracketing the entryway. And something unexpected: a group of Norse sailors had broken into the tomb in the twelfth century (four thousand years after the tomb's construction!) and taken shelter in it through a three-day storm. This was known because they had passed the time carving runes on the walls, which told their story. The woman pointed to lines and translated: " 'Happy is he who finds the great treasure.' And over here: 'Ingrid is the most beautiful woman in the world.' "

"You're kidding."

"That's what it says. And look here, you'll see they did some drawing as well."

She pointed out three graceful line figures, cut presumably with axe blades: a walrus, a narwhal, and a dragon. He had seen all three in the shops of Kirkwall, reproduced in silver for earrings and pendants. "They're beautiful," he said.

"A good eye, that Viking."

He looked at them for a long time, then walked around the chamber to look at the runes again. It was a suggestive alphabet, harsh and angular. The guide seemed in no hurry, she answered his questions at length. She was a guide in the summer, and sewed sweaters and quilts in the winter. Yes, the winters were dark. But not very cold. Average temperature around thirty.

"That warm?"

"Aye, it's the Gulf Stream you see. It's why Britain is so warm, and Norway too for that matter."

Britain so warm. "I see," he said carefully.

Back outside he stood and blinked in the strong afternoon light. He had just emerged from a five-thousand-year-old tomb. Down by the lock the standing stones were visible, both rings. Ingrid is the most beautiful woman in the world. He looked at Brodgar, a circle of black dots next to a silver sheen of water. It was a memorial too, although what it was supposed to make its viewers remember was no longer clear. A great chief; the death of one year, birth of the next; the planets, moon and sun in their courses. Or something else, something simpler. *Here we are.*

It was still midafternoon judging by the sun, so he was surprised to look at his watch and see it was six o'clock. Amazing. It was going to be just like his therapy! Only better because outdoors, in the sunlight and the wind. Spend summer in the Orkneys, winter in the Falklands, which were said to be very similar. . . . He drove back to Kirkwall and had dinner in a hotel restaurant. The waitress was tall, attractive, about forty. She asked him where he was from, and he asked her when it would get busy (July), what the population of Kirkwall was (about ten thousand, she guessed) and what she did in the winter (accounting). He had broiled scallops and a glass of white wine. Afterward he sat in the Sierra and looked at his map. He wanted to sleep in the car, but hadn't yet seen a good place to park for the night.

The northwest tip of Mainland looked promising, so he drove across

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the middle of the island again, passing Stenness and Brodgar once more. The stones of Brodgar stood silhouetted against a western sky banded orange and pink and white and red.

At the very northwest tip of the island, the Point of Buckquoy, there was a small parking lot, empty this late in the evening. Perfect. Extending west from the point was a tidal causeway, now covered by the sea; a few hundred yards across the water was a small island called the Brough of Birsay, a flat loaf of sandstone tilted up to the west, so that one could see the whole grass top of it. There were ruins and a museum at the near end, a small lighthouse on the west point. Clearly something to check out the next day.

South of the point, the western shore of the island curved back in a broad, open bay. Behind its beach stood the well-preserved ruins of a sixteenth century palace. The bay ended in a tall sea cliff called Marwick Head, which had a tower on its top that looked like an excellent broch, but was, he discovered in his guidebook, the Kitchener Memorial. Offshore in 1916 the *HMS Hampshire* had hit a mine and sunk, and six hundred men, including Kitchener, had drowned.

Odd, to see that. A couple of weeks ago (it felt like years) he had read that when the German front lines had been informed of Kitchener's death, they had started ringing bells and banging pots and pans in celebration; the noisemaking had spread up and down the German trenches, from the Belgian coast to the Swiss frontier.

He spread out his sleeping bag and foam pad in the back of the station wagon, and lay down. He had a candle for reading, but he did not want to read. The sound of the waves was loud. There was still a bit of light in the air; these northern summer twilights were really long. The sun had seemed to slide off to the right rather than descend, and suddenly he understood what it would be like to be above the Arctic Circle in midsummer: the sun would just keep sliding off to the right until it brushed the northern horizon, and then it would slide up again into the sky. He needed to live in Ultima Thule.

The car rocked slightly on a gust of wind. It had been windy all day; apparently it was windy all the time here, the main reason the islands were treeless. He lay back and looked at the roof of the car. A car made a good tent: flat floor, no leaks. . . . As he fell asleep he thought, it was a party a mile wide and a thousand miles long.

He woke at dawn, which came just before five A.M. His shadow and the car's shadow were flung out toward the brough, which was an island still, as the tidal bar was covered again. Exposed for only two hours each side of low tide, the guidebook said.

He ate breakfast by the car, and then rather than wait for the causeway to clear he drove south, around the Bay of Birsay and behind Marwick Head, to the Bay of Skaill. It was a quiet morning. He had the one-lane track to himself. It cut through green pastures. Smoke rose from farmhouse chimneys and flattened out to the east. The farmhouses were white,

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with slate roofs and two white chimneys, one at each end of the house. Ruins of farmhouses built to the same design stood nearby, or in back pastures.

He came to another parking lot, containing five or six cars. A path had been cut through tall grass just behind the bay beach, and he followed it south. It ran nearly a mile around the curve of the bay, past a big nineteenth century manor house, apparently still occupied. Near the south point of the bay stretched a low concrete seawall and a small modern building, and some interruptions in the turf above the beach. Holes, it looked like. The pace of his walk picked up. A few people were bunched around a man in a tweed coat. Another guide?

Yes. It was Skara Brae.

The holes in the ground were the missing roofs of Stone Age houses buried in the sand; their floors were about twelve feet below the turf. The interior walls were made of the same slabs as everything else on the island, stacked with the same precision. Stone hearths, stone bedframes, stone dressers: because of the islands' lack of wood, the guide was saying, and the ready availability of the slabs, most of the houses' furniture had been made of stone. And so it had endured.

Stacks of slabs held up longer ones, making shelves in standard college student bricks-and-boards style. Cupboards were inset in the walls. There was a kind of stone kitchen cabinet, with mortar and pestle beneath. It was instantly obvious what everything was for; everything looked deeply familiar.

Narrow passageways ran between houses. These too had been covered; apparently driftwood or whale rib beams had supported turf roofs over the entire village, so that during bad storms they need never go out. The first mall, Frank thought. The driftwood had included pieces of spruce, which had to have come from North America. The Gulf Stream again.

Frank stood at the back of a group of seven, listening to the guide as he looked down into the homes. The guide was bearded, stocky, fiftyish. Like the Maes Howe guide he was good at his work, wandering about with no obvious plan, sharing what he knew without memorized speeches. The village had been occupied for about six hundred years, beginning around 3000 B.C. Brodgar and Maes Howe had been built during those years, so probably people from here had helped in their construction. The bay had likely been a fresh-water lagoon at that time, with a beach separating it from the sea. Population about fifty or sixty. A heavy dependence on cattle and sheep, with lots of seafood as well. Sand filled in the homes when the village was abandoned, and turf grew over it. In 1850 a big storm tore the turf off and exposed the homes, completely intact except for the roofs. . . .

Water seepage had rounded every stone edge, so that each slab looked sculpted and caught at the light. Each house a luminous work of art. And five thousand years old, yet *so* familiar: the same needs, the same thinking, the same solutions. . . . A shudder ran through him, and he noticed that he was literally slack-jawed. He closed his mouth and almost

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laughed aloud. Open-mouthed astonishment could be so natural sometimes, so physical, unconscious, genuine.

When the other tourists left, he continued to wander about. The guide, sensing another enthusiast, joined him.

"It's like the Flintstones," Frank said, and laughed.

"The what?"

"You expect to see stone TVs and the like."

"Oh aye. It's very contemporary, isn't it?"

"It's marvelous."

Frank walked from house to house, and the guide followed, and they talked. "Why is this one called the chief's house?"

"It's just a guess, actually. Everything in it is a bit bigger and better, that's all. In our world a chief would have it."

Frank nodded. "Do you live out here?"

"Aye." The guide pointed at the little building beyond the site. He had owned a hotel in Kirkwall, but sold it; Kirkwall had been too hectic for him. He had gotten the job here and moved out, and was very happy with it. He was getting a degree in archaeology by correspondence. The more he learned, the more amazed he was to be here; it was one of the most important archaelogical sites in the world, after all. There wasn't a better one. No need to imagine furnishings and implements, "and to see so clearly how much they thought like we do."

Exactly. "Why did they leave, in the end?"

"No one knows."

"Ah."

They walked on.

"No sign of a fight, anyway."

"Good."

The guide asked Frank where he was staying, and Frank told him about the Sierra.

"I see!" the man said. "Well, if you need the use of a bathroom, there's one here at the back of the building. For a shave, perhaps. You look like you haven't had the chance in a while."

Frank rubbed a hand over his stubble, blushing. In fact he hadn't thought of shaving since well before leaving London. "Thanks," he said. "Maybe I'll take you up on that."

They talked about the ruins a while longer, and then the guide walked out to the seawall, and let Frank wander in peace.

He looked down in the rooms, which still glowed as if lit from within. Six hundred years of long summer days, long winter nights. Perhaps they had set sail for the Falklands. Five thousand years ago.

He called good-bye to the guide, who waved. On the way back to the car park he stopped once to look back. Under a carpet of cloud the wind was thrashing the tall beach grass, every waving stalk distinct, the clouds' underside visibly scalloped; and all of it touched with a silvery edge of light.

* * *

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He ate lunch in Stromness, down by the docks, watching the fishing boats ride at anchor. A very practical-looking fleet, of metal and rubber and bright plastic buoys. In the afternoon he drove the Sierra around Scapa Flow and over a bridge at the east channel, the one Winston had ordered blocked with sunken ships. The smaller island to the south was covered with green fields and white farmhouses.

Late in the afternoon he drove slowly back to the point of Buckquoy, stopping for a look in the nearby ruins of the sixteenth century earl's palace. Boys were playing soccer in the roofless main room.

The tide was out, revealing a concrete walkway set on a split bed of wet brown sandstone. He parked and walked over in the face of a stiff wind, onto the Brough of Birsay.

Viking ruins began immediately, as erosion had dropped part of the old settlement into the sea. He climbed steps into a tight network of knee-high walls. Compared to Skara Brae, it was a big town. In the middle of all the low foundations rose the shoulder-high walls of a church. Twelfth century, ambitious Romanesque design: and yet only fifty feet long, and twenty wide! Now this was a pocket cathedral. It had had a monastery connected to it, however; and some of the men who worshipped in it had traveled to Rome, Moscow, Newfoundland.

Picts had lived here before that; a few of their ruins lay below the Norse. Apparently they had left before the Norse arrived, though the record wasn't clear. What was clear was that people had been living here for a long, long time.

After a leisurely exploration of the site Frank walked west, up the slope of the island. It was only a few hundred yards to the lighthouse on the cliff, a modern white building with a short fat tower.

Beyond it was the edge of the island. He walked toward it and emerged from the wind shelter the island provided; a torrent of gusts almost knocked him back. He reached the edge and looked down.

At last something that looked as if he thought it would! It was a long way to the water, perhaps a hundred and fifty feet. The cliff was breaking off in great stacks, which stood free and tilted out precariously, as if they were going to fall at any moment. Great stone cliffs, with the sun glaring directly out from them, and the surf crashing to smithereens on the rocks below: it was so obviously, grandiloquently the End of Europe that he had to laugh. A place made to cast oneself from. End the pain and fear, do a Hart Crane off the stern of Europe . . . except this looked like the bow, actually. The bow of a very big ship, crashing westward through the waves; yes, he could feel it in the soles of his feet. And foundering, he could feel that too, the shudders, the rolls, the last sluggish list. So jumping overboard would be redundant at best. The end would come, one way or another. Leaning out against the gale, feeling like a Pict or Viking, he knew he stood at the end. End of a continent, end of a century; end of a culture.

* * *

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And yet there was a boat, coming around Marwick Head from the south, a little fishing tub from Stromness, rolling horribly in the swell. Heading northwest, out to—out to where? There were no more islands out there, not until Iceland anyway, or Greenland, Spitsbergen . . . where was it going at this time of day, near sunset and the west wind tearing in?

He stared at the trawler for a long time, rapt at the sight, until it was nothing but a black dot near the horizon. Whitecaps covered the sea, and the wind was still rising, gusting really hard. Gulls skated around on the blasts, landing on the cliffs below. The sun was very near the water, sliding off to the north, the boat no more than flotsam: and then he remembered the causeway and the tide.

He ran down the island and his heart leaped when he saw the concrete walkway washed by white water, surging up from the right. Stuck here, forced to break into the museum or huddle in a corner of the church . . . but no; the concrete stood clear again. If he ran—

He pounded down the steps and ran over the rough concrete. There were scores of parallel sandstone ridges still exposed to the left, but the right side was submerged already, and as he ran a broken wave rolled up onto the walkway and drenched him to the knees, filling his shoes with seawater and scaring him much more than was reasonable. He cursed and ran on.

Onto the rocks and up five steps. At his car he stopped, gasping for breath. He got in the passenger side and took off his boots, socks, and pants. Put on dry pants, socks, and running shoes.

He got back out of the car.

The wind was now a constant gale, ripping over the car and the point and the ocean all around. It was going to be tough to cook dinner on his stove; the car made a poor windbreak, wind rushing under it right at stove level.

He got out the foam pad, and propped it with his boots against the lee side of the car. The pad and the car's bulk gave him just enough wind shelter to keep the little Bluet's gas flame alive. He sat on the asphalt behind the stove, watching the flames and the sea. The wind was tremendous, the Bay of Birsay driven by whitecaps, more white than blue. The car rocked on its shock absorbers. The sun had finally slid sideways into the sea, but clearly it was going to be a long blue dusk.

When the water was boiling he poured in a dried Knorr's soup and stirred it, put it back on the flame for a few more minutes, then killed the flame and ate, spooning split pea soup straight from the steaming pot into his mouth. Soup, bit of cheese, bit of salami, red wine from a tin cup, more soup. It was absurdly satisfying to make a meal in these conditions: the wind was in a fury!

When he was done eating he opened the car door and put away his dinner gear, then got out his windbreaker and rain pants and put them on. He walked around the carpark, and then up and down the low cliffy

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edges of the point of Buckquoy, watching the North Atlantic get torn by a full force gale. People had done this for thousands of years. The rich twilight blue looked as if it would last forever.

Eventually he went to the car and got his notebooks. He returned to the very tip of the point, feeling the wind like slaps on the ear. He sat with his legs hanging over the drop, the ocean on three sides of him, the wind pouring across him, left to right. The horizon was a line where purest blue met bluest black. He kicked his heels against the rock. He could see just well enough to tell which pages in the notebooks had writing on them; he tore these from the wire spirals, and bunched them into balls and threw them away. They flew off to the right and disappeared immediately in the murk and whitecaps. When he had disposed of all the pages he had written on he cleared the long torn shreds of paper out of the wire rings, and tossed them after the rest.

It was getting cold, and the wind was a constant kinetic assault. He went back to the car and sat in the passenger seat. His notebooks lay on the driver's seat. The western horizon was a deep blue, now. Must be eleven at least.

After a time he lit the candle and set it on the dash. The car was still rocking in the wind, and the candle flame danced and trembled on its wick. All the black shadows in the car shivered too, synchronized perfectly with the flame.

He picked up a notebook and opened it. There were a few pages left between damp cardboard covers. He found a pen in his daypack. He rested his hand on the page, the pen in position to write, its tip in the quivering shadow of his hand. He wrote, "I believe that man is good. I believe we stand at the dawn of a century that will be more peaceful and prosperous than any in history." Outside it was dark, and the wind howled. ●

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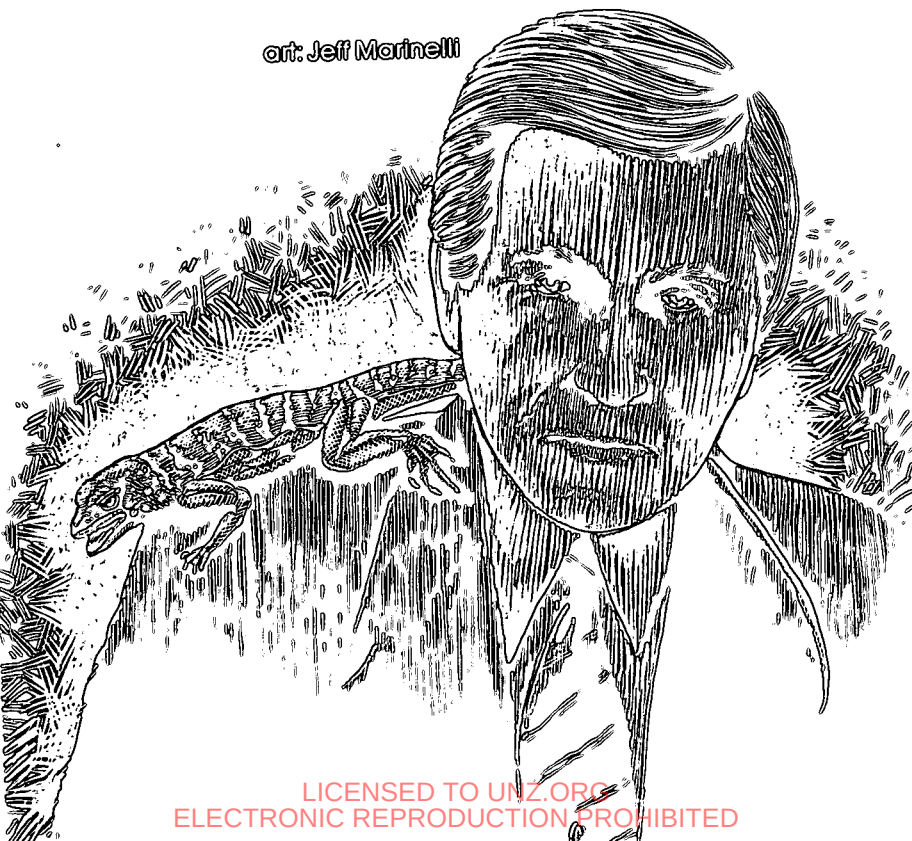
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DETAILS

by Lawrence Person

While adjusting to a changing world is often disorienting and difficult, for Jason Wright it may be virtually impossible . . .

art: Jeff Marinelli



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It started with the coffee cups.

Jason Wright was sitting at the breakfast table, looking through the *Times*, when Linda brought him his coffee. He brought the cup to his lips while reading the second page of the business section, then glanced at it as he set it down on the table. After a moment, he glanced back again.

"Honey?"

"Hum?"

"Where'd you get the new cups."

"What new cups?"

"These. The black ones."

Linda walked out of the kitchen and put the plate of eggs, bacon, and toasted bagel down in front of him. "They're not new. They're the same cups your mother gave us on our second anniversary."

"Honey, the cups my mother gave us were brown. These are black."

Her eyebrows wrinkled in perplexity. "Jason, the cups your mother gave us are *black*. These are the same cups. They've never been brown."

"I mean, it's no big deal. If you broke some and replaced them it's fine, I'm sure she's not going to care, but I was just—"

"Jason, I didn't *break* anything. These are the *same cups*."

"Okay, never mind, just forget I mentioned it."

She stared at him a moment, a tiny, angry frown still on her face, then went back into the kitchen.

The rest of the morning passed in silence.

The day at work started out with the usual emergencies and Stuff That Had To Be Done Yesterday. The latest batch of specialty cables from Taiwan was being held by customs because there was no country of origin stamped on them, the DRAM shipment for Tech was two days late, and the first lot of cases for the Neptune 3TM had to be sent back because of inadequate shielding. All of this kept him on the phone till lunchtime, and a meeting with the techs ate up another two hours after that.

"Hey Jason!"

Jason pulled his head out of accounting and saw Ed Upton walking down the corridor toward him. Ed was the company's top salesman and also a drummer in a local jazz band, and thus Jason's guide to the city's music scene. He was about 6'1", black, a sharp dresser, and one hell of a lady's man.

"Man, I must admit, you had it pegged," said Ed, walking toward him.

"What pegged?"

"Denver over Boston, man. You had me cold."

"Oh yeah, that." The Morning From Hell had made him forget about

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the bet he and Ed had made last week. "I told you they were nothing with Bird out."

"Well, you were right," Ed said, pulling out his wallet. "Want to double or nothing on the Chicago-Houston game?"

"Why, you taking Chicago?"

"Air Jordan? Hell yes!" said Ed, handing him the bill.

"I think Akeem's got his number. Where are they playing?"

"Chicago."

Jason tilted his head back a moment. "Give me five points."

"No way, man. Three, maybe."

"All right, four."

Ed nodded and laughed. "All right, I can live with that. Four it is." They shook on it.

"Let me get back to the disaster area."

"All right, stay cool."

Jason smiled and got out his wallet as he walked back to his office. Then stopped as he stared at the bill Ed had handed him.

"Hey, hey Ed!"

"Yeah?" Ed replied, sticking his head out of Sales.

"What's with the funny money?" Jason asked, still smiling.

"What funny money, man? I gave you the ten I owed you, what's the big deal?"

"Yeah, well tell me whose picture's on here?"

Ed looked at the bill.

"Well, offhand I'd say it was Henry Clay. So?"

"So? What do you mean, 'so'?"

"*What I mean* is, so what? You got problems with history or something?"

"C'mon, you know Hamilton's on the ten dollar bill."

"Who? Look, man, I don't know what you're talking about. I gave you your money, so don't get weird on me now."

Jason laughed. "Okay, man, whatever you say. I mean, this is pretty good, where'd you get it done?"

Ed sighed as he shook his head, looking puzzled.

"Man, you are just *too* strange sometimes," he said, then went back into the sales department.

Jason laughed once again, then went to his office.

Damn, that *was* one hell of an engraving job on those bills. So good, in fact, that it could get some novelty shop people busted for counterfeiting. Jason took another bill out of his wallet to compare it against.

And froze.

A strange face looked up at him from a twenty dollar bill. CALHOUN, read the name below it.

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Suddenly, Jason felt very, very cold.

With his hands shaking slightly, he pulled the other bills out of his wallet. The five still had Abraham Lincoln on it, and the one George Washington. Jason's heart started to slow down, and he made an effort to breath in slow, steady strokes. He looked carefully at the array of currency in front of him, his eyes darting from bill to bill. All of them looked normal, just like the money he had always used.

But they weren't.

Jason stared at the bills until another supply problem provided a welcome distraction.

Thanks to the construction they were doing on Robinson Parkway, traffic on the way home was worse than usual, and he didn't get in till just before six.

Linda was in the kitchen, slicing bell peppers. He leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"How was work?"

"Don't ask."

"I tried to catch you before you left. We're out of milk and dog food."

"Can it wait till tomorrow?"

She shook her head. "Charlie's completely out of Gravy Train. O-U-T, out."

He sighed. "All right, I'll go after dinner."

Jason started toward the bedroom, then turned back to his wife.

"Honey?"

"Hmm?"

"Who's on the ten dollar bill?"

Linda looked up. "Calhoun, isn't it? No, wait, *Clay*, Calhoun's on the twenty." She smiled, her blue eyes bright with mischief. "What is this, a quiz? Do I win a prize?"

"No, I just wanted to see if you knew."

She laughed. "Try me on the state capitals, I got an A+ on that in school."

Jason smiled, then went into the bedroom to change clothes.

A few minutes later he was sitting down in the bathroom, staring up at the ceiling. There was a water stain near the air vent that he'd been promising to fix for three or four years. It wasn't any big deal, and Linda had never complained after noticing it the first time, but he always put PAINT BATHROOM CEILING at the bottom of the fix it list he wrote up every spring.

Indeed, there were very few things Linda complained about at all. Not the fifty hour work weeks, nor the expensive stereo, nor the two hundred dollars or so he spent on jazz CDs every month. And she never griped

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if he missed an opening at one of the tiny galleries near the university that exhibited her work. He wondered what Linda would say if he told her their money had changed, that every day before today he had seen Alexander Hamilton's face on the ten dollar bill rather than Henry Clay's.

He thought briefly about going to the library the next day, but didn't know what he could prove, even to himself. He barely knew who Andrew Jackson and Alexander Hamilton were anyway, and it wasn't something that came up in casual conversation. God, he knew as little about *them* as he knew about Clay and Calhoun—vague historical figures he had heard something about in school, but little more. Hell, he'd seen a poll a few weeks before that said that 10 or 15 percent of the nation didn't even know who *George Bush* was.

Still, he wished they had an encyclopedia so he could look up their names anyway, just to see if Clay and Calhoun were Presidents. He and Linda had talked about getting one shortly after their wedding, deciding to wait until after their first child. That was before the miscarriage.

Jason sighed and closed his eyes, thinking about that night. It had been almost eight years, but he could still remember every detail. The drive to the emergency room at three in the morning, the old Celica topping out at a hundred as he raced down the deserted interstate, Linda all but screaming from the pain. Somehow the fact that she would never have children hadn't seemed so important when he found out she was going to live.

Jason sighed again and looked up at the spot on the ceiling. There were some things more important than whose face was on the ten dollar bill. He stood up and flushed the toilet.

Things changed.

There was nothing as obvious as the money, at least not that he could see. But *tiny* things—small details—changed. The army/navy store he passed on his way to work every morning became a Pizza Hut overnight. The chairs in the company waiting room changed from green to red. Cheek tattoos were suddenly common among fashion models, while punk rock stars seemed enamored of kilts. And one Thursday morning he was reading the stat page of the sports section when he found out that there was now an NBA team in Nashville called the Pickers.

During the first few months, he almost got used to it.

It didn't really seem to matter that his car had gone from blue to yellow, that the mayor's name had changed from Barkley to Martinez, that Diana Ross was now Mrs. Huxtable on the Cosby show. Indeed, not all the changes were bad. One morning he was pleasantly surprised when the pop radio station he listened to in the car suddenly had different call

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letters and an all-jazz format. He laughed and tapped his fingers in time to Dexter Gordon all the way to work.

But for every pleasant change, there were one or two that were for the worse, and many that were simply inexplicable. Jason woke one Monday to find that Baptist men were required to wear ceremonial cavalry sabers, while public executions were the most popular show on TV. By themselves, each of the changes were only slightly disorienting, but together they took on an almost sinister air.

He tried not to think about it.

One morning at work, Jason picked up the copy of *UNIX Today* he had been reading the day before and went back to an article on the growing market in Zuthawanta, which was evidently a country that occupied most of Southern Africa. He started reading the story, stopped, rubbed his eyes, then looked down at the magazine again. The letters were unchanged.

Lik¥ many form¥r Polish coloni¥s, th¥ quality of th¥ t¥l¥phon¥ syst¥m in Zuthawanta's major citi¥s is consid¥rably b¥low that in th¥ Unit¥d Stat¥s and ¥urop¥. As such, lin¥ nois¥ factors r¥main an obstacl¥ to—

Oh my God, he thought, *they've taken the letter E*. He stared at the page for a few moments, then got up and closed the door to his office. Then he sat down, put his head in his hands, and started to cry.

Despite his gradual alienation from a world that changed by tiny fractions as he slept, Linda was remarkably loving and supportive. There were times when she stared at him in exasperation when some query or lapse would reveal the gaps in his knowledge, but her most common response was worried concern. She even suggested that they see a neurologist on the off chance he had a premature form of Alzheimer's disease. Or at least he *thought* it was Alzheimer's she was talking about, though the name she used was Morley's Fugue. He finally went to a doctor just to satisfy her. "Mr. Wright, your tests show mondo zup," one doctor had said, "you're as fit as an albatross."

Surprisingly, their sex life improved considerably during the same period of time. Whatever else changed in the world, he and Linda were the same, and the pleasure they got from making love was undiminished. As the intangible aspects of his world slipped slowly away from him, the physical passion he felt for his wife increased, and their sessions of lovemaking became longer and more intense. Afterward, he would hold her tightly in his arms, trying to banish his fear and uncertainty with the magic of her presence.

At work, the changes were making it harder and harder to function.

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Just the day before, he had been sitting in a meeting when Mr. Thompson, the company president, had asked him about a company he had never heard of, and it turned out that they were a major competitor.

But worst of all was the language. Slowly but surely, the words his coworkers were using became a foreign tongue, diverging from his own by minute degrees of arc. He would be having a perfectly normal conversation with someone when they would use a word he had never heard before, or use a normal word in a bizarre context, talking about a Chinese place that served "the most wonderful sweet and sour trampoline."

Inch by inch, he was drowning.

One Thursday morning, he walked into the office and found Ed Upton talking to the receptionist at the front desk.

"Hello, Ed," he said, then stopped.

There was a lizard sitting on Ed's right shoulder.

He looked up from the lizard and saw Ed, in turn, staring at *his* right shoulder.

"Hey, Jason, you look, ah, *different* today," said Ed at last.

"Well . . . I try."

"Yeah, I guess so."

Jason just nodded and walked toward his office, saying hello to the accountant on his way.

He also had a lizard on his shoulder.

Jason passed two other men, one of them the company vice president. Both had lizards on their shoulders, and both regarded him with the same look they might give a panhandler who hadn't bathed since the Carter administration. Jason retreated to his office and tried to lose himself in writing the weekly report.

About ten minutes later, there was a knock on his door.

"Come in."

The door opened up and Thompson walked in, wearing a large green lizard with red mottling on his right shoulder. "Jason, mind if I ramtificate with you a moment?"

"Ah, no, not at all."

Thompson came in and closed the door behind him, then went and sat on the edge of Jason's obsidian desk.

"Jason, I really don't know what to say to you," he began, adjusting his rhinestone-studded glasses, "I know that you've had, well, *difficulties* as of late, though I'm really not sure what they are, or why you haven't told us about them."

Jason was silent.

"Anyway, that's all flies in the barn now. I know that we pride ourselves on being loose around here, but we *do* have our standards. We're

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professionals, Jason, you splendate that as well as I do. You just *can't* show up to work without your lizard. *You* can't, *I* can't, none of us can."

"I . . . I just forgot."

"You *forgot*?" said Thompson incredulously. "How could you *forget* your *lizard*?" Thompson sighed and shifted on the desk. "Look, Jason, I don't want to be too hard on you. Despite the fact that your work has, well, *slipped* a little recently, you've done excellent work for us in the potato. So I'm going to give you a chance to go home, get some rest, and come back tomorrow—*with* your lizard . . . and we'll just pretend this never monkfish. All right?"

Jason merely nodded.

He spent the rest of the day driving around the city, noticing the cumulative effect of all the small changes he had tried so hard to ignore before. He had lived there for almost ten years, but now it seemed an alien and baffling place, minarets and black obelisks dotting the skyline where there had been only buildings of glass and steel before. Weird trees with red flowers seemed to bloom on every corner, while neon billboards flashed the names of unknown products in hypnotic pulses. At length, tears ran down his cheeks and he steered the long maroon car toward home.

The next morning, he left the house wearing what he assumed was his best suit, *with* his lizard on his shoulder. He had found the lizard the night before on the top shelf of his dresser, all but motionless on the yellow-grained wood. He'd thought that he might have some trouble catching it and keeping it on, but he hadn't. The creature let itself be picked up without stirring, then dug its tiny claws into his jacket's shoulder padding and clung there. *Either these are the most mellow creatures on the planet*, he thought, *or you're supposed to feed them Quaaludes.*

Jason closed the door behind him and headed for the car. It was a dreary morning, with gray, overcast skies and a 50 percent chance of rain (or "skywater," as the morning weathermen put it).

He unlocked the car door, opened it, sat down—

And stopped.

The steering wheel was on the other side.

Jason jumped out of the car as though there were a rattlesnake in it, his hands trembling uncontrollably. He turned back to the street, and watched as a blue-and-yellow plaid sports car cruised by.

Driving on the *left* side of the road.

Jason sat down heavily in the driveway, a sound halfway between a scream and a sigh escaping his lips. He thought briefly about trying to drive to work despite the change, then vividly imagined making a right turn from the left lane and getting confused, hearing the squeal of brakes just before the head-on collision . . .

He closed his eyes and rubbed his hands across his face, trying to tell

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himself that it was just as well. He didn't think he would have been able to continue to function at work much longer anyway. If it hadn't been this, it would have been something else. It was only a matter of time, really, before another incident at work got him fired, or before some other change in traffic rules (a switch in stoplight colors, perhaps?) endangered his life.

Only a matter of time.

Jason stood up and staggered into the house, where Linda was busy watering the ivy on the living room wall. She took one look at him and put down her watering gun.

"Jason, what's wrong?"

"I don't . . . I can't . . ." he began, then collapsed sobbing into her arms, clinging to her like a drowning man reaching for a life preserver.

He received a flurry of get-well cards over the next week or so, many of them with jokes he didn't understand. Linda drove him to another doctor, who pronounced that Jason was suffering from a "nervous wolverine" and wrote a prescription for red pills that had Snoopy's face engraved on them. After a few weeks of medicated rest (*whatever* the pills were, they *weren't* placebos), Jason started to worry about what they would survive on. They had some money saved away, but he figured that would be exhausted in little over a year, and he wanted to avoid dipping into the IRA. However, to his bemused surprise he found that he had "insanity insurance," and the bimonthly checks they started to receive, though less than his previous income, were still more than enough to live on.

Then the prescription ran out, and Jason found that the problem was not money, but time—or rather, an overabundance of it. The world had become such a strange and disturbing place that he had trouble finding things to do that didn't confuse or terrify him. Reading was difficult, and keeping up with the news all but impossible. Television was a little better. He could decipher at least *some* of what was going on through body language, especially in the sitcoms he had thought were so stupid before. But that too became more and more difficult as time passed, and he began to get headaches every time he watched. He finally gave up on prime-time television altogether, even abandoning his favorite show, "Who's The Spittoon?"

He kept up with MTV a little longer, finding the scantly clad women and bizarre animation that paraded across his screen moderately interesting, especially with the sound turned off and Woody Herman playing on the stereo. But a few weeks later he found that every third video seemed to have a live goat-killing in it, and he gave that up too.

Finally, as a last resort, he retreated into the world of sports, watching game after game of whatever came on the cable with a quiet, mind-numbing fervor. He found football especially soothing, reveling in its hallowed ritualism like a born-again Christian going to church on Easter

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Sunday. College, pro, high school, it didn't matter. If it was football, Jason watched it.

And watched still as the field inexplicably narrowed and the team sizes increased. He watched even when it become something resembling Australian rules football, then a cross between soccer and field hockey, and finally an incomprehensible game played with what appeared to be living balls of fur and long, flexible cattle prods.

And through all this, despite an ever-widening chasm between the two of them, Linda still loved him. Although she cried often, and the alien words she spoke to him were all too frequently filled with sadness, she stayed with him throughout it all, the only unchanging rock in the sea of chaos his life had become.

He had lost everything except her, but, for the time being, she was enough.

Jason heard his wife call him from the kitchen, and he turned off the TV. He wasn't really interested in Belgian Rules Badminton anyway, though he was looking forward to Combat Juggling at seven.

As he walked past the zebra-striped walls in the hallway, he resolved yet again to eat whatever Linda laid before him, no matter how awful-looking it was. The week before he had blanched at eating what appeared to be an algae casserole dotted with cow eyes, and Linda had run sobbing to the bedroom, where she locked herself in the statue closet for almost half an hour. Jason didn't care if her latest dish consisted of live ants, he was going to *eat* the damn thing.

He kneeled down on the tatami mats set in front of the dining room table and made a show of reading the sports section, staring at a picture of Larry Bird plunging a knife into a target of concentric rings on a backboard. Finally, he heard the glockenspiel chimes that signaled dinner was ready. Linda came out of the kitchen bearing both their plates, and he watched appreciatively as her still shapely legs rubbed against the diaphanous material of her cooking kimono. She walked behind him, then reached forward to lay a plate of steak and mashed potatoes in front of him.

Jason breathed a sigh of relief as he picked up his steak knife in one hand, the other catching Linda's hand and bringing it to his lips. After kissing it, he looked up into her eyes.

They were brown.

The police finally came about a week and a half later, following up on complaints from the other members of Linda's jai alai team after she failed to show up for the local Papal challenge. They pressed the flasher several times, then, finding the door unlocked, let themselves in. They found Jason, glassy eyed and unshaven, watching QSPN in the opium room. A ripe, unpleasant smell permeated the house.

A few minutes later, they found Linda's body.

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Jason had laid her out lovingly on the bed, her hands folded over her heart, her face peaceful despite the gash in her neck.

The police read Jason passages from the *Koran* as they locked the hoop and muzzle around him, then carried his unresisting body out to the hovercraft, where they dropped him unceremoniously into the rear hopper. The Hallelujah chorus wailed through the top speakers as the engine started up, the bright purple police light bouncing up and down in its tube. A few neighbors turned from where they had been decorating their shrubbery with whalebones to watch Jason's departure, shook their heads sadly, then walked over to his house to urinate on his driveway.

From the window of his cell, Jason observed the last vestiges of his world disappear, watching as the sky turned yellow and great lumbering reptiles wandered across the red sanatorium lawn. At night, he stared at his reflection in the window, watching as his face slowly but surely changed beyond all recognition.

Finally, at long last, the doctors pronounced him cured. ●

THE WATCHER

I am the one assigned to watch you,
the one who knows your favorite vegetable
and sexual position. Today, because

it is Wednesday, and raining, you will wear
the charcoal cardigan beneath your London Fog,
thinking it will make you seem slimmer

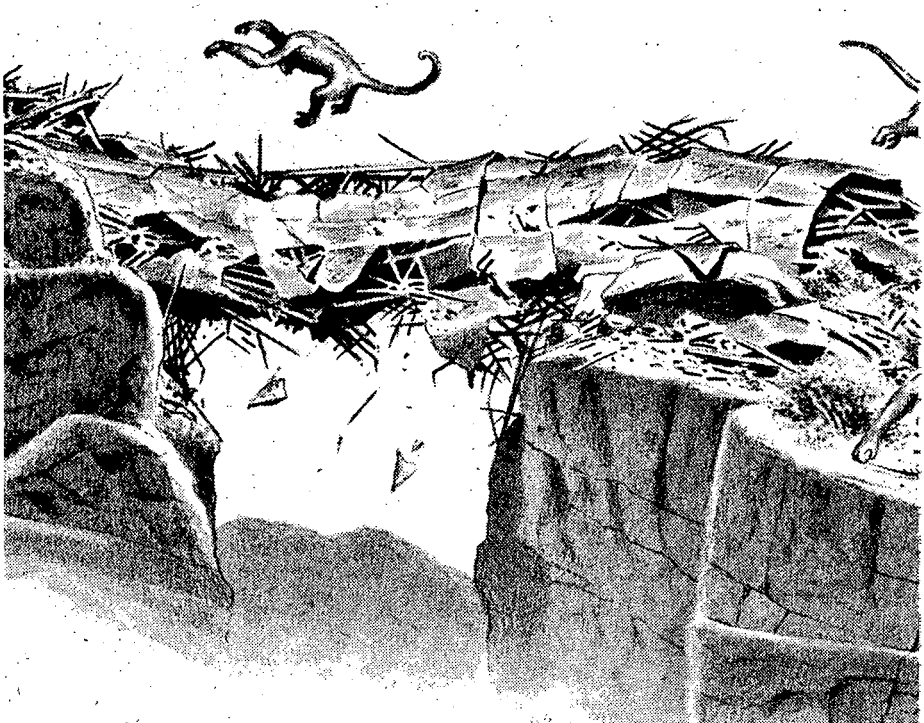
to the redheaded waitress at Louie's.
Yes, I am the reason your underarms
suddenly sweat, the nothing there

that crawls along your spine. I
do not know why it is that I watch you,
but if you should somehow notice me,

you will find a reason, you will find
oh, many reasons why your errors are
important enough for me to waste my time.

—David Lunde

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BUILD A TOWER TO THE SKY

by David Ira Cleary

"Build a Tower to the Sky" was written at the Clarion Workshop. Mr. Cleary's work has been published in *Full Spectrum II*, and he is in the process of writing a novel that will fuse the traditional elements of Cyberpunk with the old-time religious revival movement. The following tale is his first to appear in *IAsfm.*

art: Bob Walters

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Raunder found the hairy-top after the Southcreek tower tumbled. The tower had never been stable; every Tanii knew that. It was square-box, not pyramid, and the rigging was so soft and sloppy that it had sometimes waved free on windy mornings. The night before, his sister, Fidian, had triangulated her grandma's bones. She'd told Raunder the tower would stand if the Southcreekers stopped building at two-hundred-fifty meters high. "Even their mathmen've gone hairy-top crazy," she'd scoffed, wiggling her treble ears. "They think their tower will kiss the stars."

By the time Raunder reached the wreck, the Southcreek area was thick with other Tanii, as if it were the Calling Festival. Their fur either amber, golden, or loam-bown, their legs and arms always long, they were climbing over the wrecked tower, digging, pulling up Southcreek metal or good long logs. They had the privilege, since the tower had fallen across the creek into free land. About twenty meters had broken off at one end, and the main body was propped up on trees. The sections in the trees were much too high to reach, and still had their paper skin. A couple of Tanii were wrapping themselves up one tree, and others were walking up the angle that the tower made, their toes clutching rods and their tails up, for balance, or wrapped around rods, to save them from falling. Raunder considered climbing a tree but then he heard shouts coming from the creek. Interested, he climbed one of the road signs with a hairy-top scribbled on it and looked.

The morning winds had yet to disturb the stillness of the mist; the creek had the illusions of the half-seen. The tower looked like a giant comfort worm, stripped to the skeleton and laid across a steaming ravine. The scavenger Tanii were running like ghosts across this dead worm, using it as a bridge. Some were throwing good logs down to the river, some were advancing—to Southcreek. This was why there was the screaming; Southcreekers were hitting the scavengers, knocking them into the water. The resonance of wood against skulls was magnified because of morning fog, and sounded like Festival drums. The scavengers splashed like dead fish. Raunder shuddered as he slid down the pole. He hoped no one would be badly hurt.

Raunder sat on the cement road, no longer interested in scavenging. The crashing tower had so damaged certain trees that bright patches of sunlight were warming the cement. He studied the debris: the broken branches like kindling, slothbird nests from other seasons, leaves that, before being shredded by the tower's crash, were as wide as his outstretched arms. He watched the others rush past him. It was funny to see the old Tanii women, with their muzzles cracked and their teeth gone, and the old men, who still had teeth because they made their own milk, all running around with stupid meter long sticks. And a child,

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even, still tailless. Everyone became a tower builder when someone else's tower fell.

The child stuck his tongue out at Raunder and ran down the hill to a stone house five meters from the nearest tree. One section of the tower had broken off from the main body and speared the house. The roof appeared to have collapsed, but the walls seemed whole. There was a window about two meters up, and the child started jumping up and down, in an ineffectual attempt to see inside.

Raunder laughed and started walking toward the house. "Hey," he said to the child, when he was a dozen steps away. The child turned and stuck his tongue out again, then ran to the end of the cement road, stepped up on a fat sandbag, and jumped into the mist-blanketed creek.

After bowing toward the creek, Raunder stepped up to the pierced house. Now this could have been dangerous, he thought. The piece of tower was about four meters long and three wide, and there was one iron rod tied together with the usual faded-red lengths of wood. Part of the paper skin had scraped off in the collision with the house, and now the purple paper hung down like a flag.

Raunder checked the door. It was locked. He stepped over to the window and peered inside. He smelled the dust; he saw it hanging, like outside's mist but dirty. The stone roof had fallen in clumps—a hex bone shape here, crystal ovoids there, powder and gypsum shards piled deep around the tower-piece. There were shapes—a Tanii mating rack, one of the hairy-tops' plastic chairs, a dimpled meditation sponge, all made mysterious by the coating of dust.

And there was a gray clenching hand.

Raunder put his hands on the stone windowsill. He jutted his muzzle into the house. He studied and was sure; the stubby fingers, with only one thumb, on an arm as thick as his own hand, but short in the squat hairy-top way. The arm seemed to end at mid-elbow, where the roof's support beam had fallen. The rest of the body had to be on the other side of the beam. He tingled with joy hormones—it was a hairy-top.

He climbed through the window hole into the house. He jumped over the beam and the rest of the body was, indeed, there, lying on its side toward the beam. There was a rock as big as a puppy egg covering the hips of the creature; grunting, Raunder pushed it off. He found the black hair, so thick and static-charged, framing the flat face. He ran his hands through the hair; amazingly, the head was round and hard. It was the missing four ears that made the touch wrong. And the two ears were at the side, not on top, visible when he brushed the hair aside. He wiped off the dust on the hairless cheeks and the pink lips. Feeling for a pulse, he ran his fingers down the smooth skin of the throat. He was getting discouraged when the hairy-top said, "Upth."

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The hairy-top was his.

Of his sisters, Sxandia was the least intelligent and the only one working Old Hightower. Raunder had seldom wondered if there was a relationship between those two facts, but today, he suspected that there was. She stood in the long line in Council square, holding her basket of molybdenum ovoids. She didn't see him as he moved out of the shadow of the vine-draped granary building. She was resting her muzzle on the shoulder of the man ahead of her, watching the hairy-tops on the steps of the Council building.

He scratched her shoulder.

"Hey!" Her muzzle pushed down the man's bass-sound ear as she turned. "Sorry," she said, but he only smiled, as if she'd been flirting. "Oh, Raunder. What're you doing here?"

"Mom said I could have the day off," he lied. Actually, he never did any work, unless it was fun. He licked his teeth, unsure if he should antagonize Sxandia with his pleasure. "I've got something new."

She nodded, her orange eyes big as if startled. "A new taffy punch? Jars of turpentine lotion?"

"No, no," he said, restraining his tail from merrily slapping the concrete. He'd stolen, not bartered for, that stuff. "It's something so good, I could get two hundred meters of iron bar easy."

Her eyes pigmented from orange to gray. "Two hundred! How can you lie to me like that!"

"I'm not lying." Raunder looked at the fat-as-a-goo-fruit grandpa waiting behind Sxandia. Not only was the man staring at him, but he wore one of the dog pelts on his head. Raunder reached up and swiped the pelt before the grandpa could even pale. He jumped out of the man's reach.

"Raunder-Kai!" Sxandia yelled.

"By the forty fumes of fervor," the goo-fruit grandpa yelled, "give that back!" He could only yell, because his place in line was precious.

"Raunder," Sxandia said, "you need to show your respect for hairy-top attributes. Otherwise they'll look upon us with disfavor."

"Favor, savior! The hairy-top don't give a grandma's gams for us. And—" he twirled the mangy pelt, so that sticks flew out and fell on the cement, " 'attributes'? What 'attributes'? This is flayed dog here. You think," he turned to the grandpa, "that you'll *look* like hairy-tops because you wear a piece of dog? For the sake of Sky, go get yourself a decent turban or a cravat. Don't waste your currency on *this*."

The man was livid, his eyes egg-shell white. "Why, why, I'll not be having a head-in-the-peat child lecturing me on—"

"Oh, take your dog skin." Raunder threw it back to the grandpa, and the older man balanced it on his head, saying, "Hmmph." Raunder turned

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to Sxandia, who'd grabbed her knees in embarrassment. "My dear, you haven't seen Fidian today, have you?"

"You—" She checked what she was about to say, and untwisted her arms. "Fidian's by the council building."

"In line?"

"No. Making fun of the hairy-tops and fiddling with her pouch of bones. She doesn't care about getting metal from them. They'll probably knock her on the head."

"Me too, I hope," Raunder said, skipping away.

Old Hightower was neither the highest tower nor the oldest. It was, however, built upon the highest peak in the area. Several generations ago, before the first copper rods had come from burning dirt, it had been the tallest, and in those days the rain-waters dripped through the great canopies of green, making the ancestors wet and cold and often miserable. So that all in the Hightower community would not die of the rainy season sickness, those brave Tanii had built intricate tunnels into the mountain, dark places where the cold rains could be avoided, and rooms where lovers could cuddle and tell stories of their star-dreams. But with the comforts of fire and stone houses allowing the Tanii to grow fat-secure, the tunnels had fallen into disuse.

Now their moss-dank darkness was fit only for child-play. And hiding. Raunder led his smartest sister Fidian to his cache, his lantern casting an uncertain sunset glow upon the fuzzy walls, catching dripping water in instant red, gone even before the sound of the splash. They turned into other tunnels. They merged with new ones. They passed silent, empty rooms. "Is this the right way?" Fidian demanded twice.

"Of course," Raunder kept saying, and then they were pushing the peat-covered panel of wood away from the entrance. The entrance was so low they brushed their tails on the top, even when they crawled. Raunder left the panel open so that they could breathe.

So small was the cache that a single lantern made it as bright as the Council Hall lit by forty candelabra. There was a single bench a meter past the entrance, and various stolen things in the two entryway corners—a pickax and bignut shovel, a dozen mica ovoids, copper tubes, and many mysterious instruments Raunder had stolen from the hairy-tops. There was some room for standing on the other side of the bench, and then, flush against the wall, where a Tanii adolescent might have squeezed, the hairy-top.

"The forty fumes!" Fidian said. "I didn't believe you!" She crawled over the bench, and squatted down. The hairy-top was on its back, its eyes closed, no doubt dreaming of the star-call. It was still gray, save for its face, which Raunder had wiped. He was intrigued by the nose and lips,

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which reminded him of bitter-fruit without the stems because the muzzle was so flat. "It's hurt," Fidian said. She ran her fingers through the oily spots on the creature's waist.

"Its blood-pipes broke when the tower fell," Raunder explained. "If it lies there it will heal, will it not?"

Fidian shrugged, her bass ears erect. "It looks like it's almost dead. And it's still in full-fatness. Look at this." She gently squeezed the sides of the mouth with the thumbs of her right hand. The fat was dimple-deep.

Raunder felt uncomfortable. He knelt down on the bench. "Maybe it's decided to give itself to the stars."

"No, I don't think so. Feel how hot it is?"

Raunder took in a little of the heat. "You're right. It's a lot warmer than they usually are. What's that mean?"

Now Fidian had her mid-pitch ears taut, as if she were ready to tumble bones upon a table. "Fighting disease, maybe. Or fast-burning fatness. But not fast enough, obviously."

It opened its eyes.

Fidian's tail snapped into Raunder's chest. "Uhh!"

"Sorry," she said, without turning.

The hairy-top looked at them. Its eyes looked like small front teeth which had been painted with black on brown then dipped in melted wax. It first said a word in the hairy-top birdsqueak. Then, as Fidian opened her high-pitch ears, the creature said, "Drink . . . please."

"It needs water." In the hairy-top argot, Fidian said, "Do you want food, too?"

The creature said, "Yes." Then it dropped the eyelids, like paper doors over tiny windows. It moved the lips together, making indecipherable mid-range noises, then Raunder could make out: "Medic . . . imitative omnivores . . . Rapid Base . . . "

"What's it mean?" Raunder asked.

"Delirium speech," Fidian explained. She watched it mumble some more, then said, "You'd better feed it something with a high water content. Like bitter-fruit. Or it's going to die."

Raunder felt his eyes cool with the greenness of worry. Hairy-tops were small but he'd always thought their size belied their strength; how else would they be strong enough to follow the star-call?

"Of course," Fidian said, rising up from her crouch, "it might be better to let it die. That would be instructive for many of us."

"Die? It's mine, Fidian. I want to keep it alive. I want to trade it for iron."

"Whatever." She stepped over the bench, brushing an elbow against his back. "I have to survey a bridge over by Lightning Tree." She glanced

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back at the hairy-top. "You'd better feed it or it'll die." Then she went down on all fours so she could get out of the cache.

Raunder squeezed the metal rod in his right hand and the vertical beam of the ladder in his left. It was a metal too light to be lead, too shiny to be copper, too hard to be silver, and too flimsy to be steel—the twenty meters between him and Sxandia above rippled with every wind. She was moving carefully up the side of the pyramid, golden and lean against the purple expanse. Raunder thought she was moving *too* slowly; the twig was so light, he was tempted to balance it on his head as he climbed.

Instead, he climbed by feel, and looked out across the forest, his muzzle over his shoulder. In a second's glance there was nothing but the green wildness, as far as the horizon, but other details resolved themselves with patience. First, the green-canopy was more than an echo of the blue sky above; it had rises, depressions, shadows and breaks. There were grays, too, rock formations. Second, there were the things not wild; the towers, most important, rising square-box, or pyramid, dyed purple like blood too rich, wide at the bottom and tapering to narrow platforms at the top. There was even Clifftower, on the canyon walls above Boiling Chute, and built of the same gray stone. Here and there, too, was other evidence of the Tanii; fishing boats bumping down the rapids of the creeks, thatch and stone huts where the trees had been felled, and, many kilometers away, thin trails of smoke rising from the green mat of leaves, no doubt the fires of hunters curing nightdog meat.

Raunder returned his attention to the ladder; he had passed the highest point to have paper skin attached. Now there was only skeleton frame, a pastiche of wood and metal, and he could see the old pyramid, Great Mother's design, small and decaying within the vastness of the surrounding Hightower. That pyramid had once been Old Hightower, and there was one even older, but it had been cannibalized, long before the mathmen discovered the strong triangle shape.

The metal rod accelerated; Raunder tightened his grip to slow it, then he looked up. Sxandia was on top of the pyramid, and other Tanii were clustered around her; one had the top of the rod in his hand. They waved at Raunder. He let go so they could pull the rod up, then he hurried to the top.

"Raunder," his cousin, Heiytil, said after Raunder had reached them, "I thought you didn't work towers."

"I don't." Raunder hunched down, balancing on the edge pole of the pyramid's skeleton. Heiytil and his cousins were wearing the dog pelts today. They were sitting or swinging from the triangle supports. Not working.

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Heiytil was persistent. "Still borrowing sandclocks from the shop?" He flickered his eyes into pink, as if he thought he was clever.

"No." Raunder amended his lie: "I'm a paper maker, now. Push a stone cylinder over wood pulp."

As if the lie was funny, Heiytil stupidly tapped his tail. Disgusted, Raunder decided to follow Johthi, the foreman, who with Sxandia was carrying the flimsy rod over to the working platform. His cousins laughed at him as he crossed the top; he used all fours, and, for balance, pointed his tail towards the sky. He had to be careful because he didn't climb every day; it was a two-hundred-meter drop to the inner pyramid. By the time he reached Johthi and Sxandia, they were both sitting on big coils of nightdog tendon, arguing. They had set the metal rod on the platform; its ends nearly reached the north and south edges of the pyramid.

"Ah, Raunder, the thief," Johthi said, then he said to Sxandia, "You can use it if you want to bring up the metal hacksaw. I'm not going to climb down there."

"The rod's flimsy, too," Raunder said, as he noticed that Johthi had an insect-riddled pelt tied to his head. No hairy-top would be so sloppy.

Johthi nodded. "It'll work better when we start square-boxing. Right now it'll have to support too much weight."

Sxandia's tail curled in distress. "But I got it from the hairy-tops."

"Oh," Johthi said. He pulled a twitching larva out of his pelt.

"So what?" Raunder asked. "It's still a worthless rod. It's about as useful as a twig."

"Enough of that, Raunder," Sxandia said.

Johthi looked at him. "If it's from the hairy-tops, it's different." He turned back to Sxandia and said, "Maybe we can use it. We can always start square-boxing early. It could be a vertical corner."

Raunder thought this was stupid. "Johthi, only Fidian can change the plans."

"Wrong. I build. I change the plans."

"But change because you want to use a stupid hairy-top rod? That's dumb."

Johthi's eyes were turning white. "You'd better learn some respect for the hairy-tops. They've followed the star-call. Something you've never done."

"So, have you? I don't see what's so good about them following the star-call anyway. Fidian's talked to mathmen from the north and the hairy-tops have eaten mountains to get at the ovoids. You want them to eat—"

"Don't you spread rumors. The hairy-top have conquered the star-seas. That—" Johthi nodded his muzzle at the rod "—was made by the hairy-tops. Likely, it was part of their boat."

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"Oh, undoubtedly. But it's still a worthless *twig*."

"Quiet, Raunder-Kai," Sxandia said.

He felt warmth in his own eyes. "No! I tell, you, it's stupid to use a twig like this."

Johthi's eyes were milk-white. "I'll not be told my business by a child who doesn't even belong up here."

"Someone needs to tell you it since you don't know it yourself." Raunder felt his ears rise, his tail tense.

"Why don't you climb down, thief?"

"Hightower's community property. Why don't *you* climb down?"

"Raunder!" his sister cried.

Johthi began to rise from his tendon coil. "You leave before I throw you."

He looked at his sister.

"Leave, Raunder."

"Fools," he whispered, then he turned and climbed back across the open skeleton.

"It seems to like bitter-fruits," Raunder said. He found their taste repugnant. "But I don't see why it can't survive on something cheaper."

Fidian was wet-sponging the dust off the hairy-top. "Do you think a dog could fly if it drank milk? Do you think moonfish could live on harvest glycerol?"

"Right, I see."

"At any rate, I don't think you paid too much for these."

Across the little room, he could feel the coolness of her mirth. Indeed, he'd stolen the basket of bitter-fruit from a stand in the market street. It gave him joy tingles to think of the irony—it was so much easier to steal these days, when the Tanii came from as far away as the Icy Rapids, just to see the hairy-tops. When he was a child, when the aliens' arrival was only a rumor from the most distant of lands, he wouldn't have tried to steal bitter-fruits even in the wettest rainstorm night. He sniffed. "Can you get rid of that urination smell, Fidian?"

"It *is* unpleasant. Here, help me."

Raunder stepped over the bench and squatted to the right of his smartest sister. The smell was stronger.

"I'll lift up and you pull the leg-covers off," Fidian said. "Be careful. I think the waist parts were crushed."

Raunder pulled; the hairy-top made a squeak at a frequency almost too high to hear. "Look," Raunder said, as he pulled the gray, grass-soft material down to the feet, "it has some hair down here, too."

"Of course," Fidian said. "Haven't you ever seen one with a short sleeved shirt? They have hair everywhere."

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"Then why's it longer on the head?"

"I don't know. The ways of the stars are strange. Move the legs apart." Fidian wiped between its legs, where it was even hairier and pink-organed. She wiped more carefully where the legs were attached to the body; it was damaged to charcoal blackness, and, in areas, there was blood dried and piled like old leaves. Flakes of blood came off as the sponge moved, falling on the moist floor, or onto the shirt, which was stained black without the dust.

Because the naked legs looked like short, fat Tamii legs which had lost a lot of fur to bone-beetles, they put the leg-covers back on the creature. Then Raunder cleaned the sponge in the wooden bucket, returned it to Fidian, and she wiped the purple bitter-fruit stains away from the little mouth.

"It's spending a lot of time dreaming the star-call," Raunder said, after they finished and sat together on the bench.

"It's still sick, I think," Fidian told him.

"Will it die?"

"Maybe. It might be better if it does."

He turned toward her, feeling his fore-ears rising in surprise. "Why? I kind of like having it."

"Johthi's not altering *your* plans for the pyramid." She brushed her fingers through the golden fur on her knees. The alien's crotch hair was just as thick, Raunder realized.

"So? That's not my alien's fault. Be mad at Johthi."

"Oh, you are so *slow,* Raunder-Kai. Everything's ultimately the hairy-tops' fault."

The heat in Fidian's eyes was making him uncomfortable. "Why not petition the Great Mother to discipline Johthi?" Raunder asked.

Fidian's eyes flashed for an instant into white. "You fool! They're wearing the dog pelts, too. Pretty soon they'll start licking the aliens' hair and wearing leg covers in warmtime."

Raunder was scared about what his sister was implying. "So . . . what can we do? You want to talk to the radical mathmen in the north?"

She shrugged her tail. "Maybe. I'm thinking, though, that if we let it die, we can can show the body to everybody. They'll realize how stupid it is to be so excited about the hairy-tops."

Raunder felt slow-tingles sinking through his legs. "But I wanted to trade it in for two hundred meters of iron bar."

Fidian bared her teeth contemptuously. "You're awfully naïve for someone who calls himself an adult. First, there's no guarantee they'll give you anything but gut-flame. Second, what'll you do with so much iron bar? It's too heavy to be at the top of Hightower."

"Start my own tower."

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"Huh? Why?"

"Sxandia's filled her skull with dumbness seeds, and Johthi's listened. Hightower'll be shorter now. It'll never reach the sea between the stars."

"Oh. Oh no." Fidian's eyes lost their color, became clear like water, as she looked up towards the sky. Raunder knew she could still use the star-wisdom, even with the many meters of tunnels, and the Hightower, physically blocking off visual contact. She was so smart she could triangulate some without their grandma's bones. "Oh no," she said, after several minutes. She brought her eyes down from the ceiling. "Dumb. I hadn't even calculated the change. If they start square-boxing, the tower'll max out only about ten meters higher than the Plateau Pyramid."

"Not high enough to reach the star-water, is it?"

"I don't think so."

Raunder had the star-dream. As in all such dreams, his mind webbed up through the thin black air of night, toward the water of the skies, the blue-dark seas that ferried the star peoples and that sometimes grew so heavy that pockets of wetness broke through cracks, drenching the Tanii and filling the rivers on the surface of the sphere. Minds could do what the greatest towers had never done; dive upward into the water dome. His mind prickle-sensitive, he splashed into the sky. He spun in the star-water like a dancing mite through fire, sucking and swallowing water so blue it radiated happiness through his webs. For an instant, his mind oriented itself toward the sphere, and he could see the horizon curve, blinding sunlight on its edge, then by the starlight he saw the green ovoid of the surface, vast horticulture victory, so far below that the trees seemed like moss and the mountains like motes. He saw nothing of the Tanii save the tiniest purple fingers—the towers almost infinitely below the water, but then he was turning toward the stars, because he heard their call.

The call. A smell of spice; a song of furnace suns; planets beating against their orbits; amplitudes of water summing into nodes; sentience scratching on midnight doors; intelligence coded into long, long wavelengths, rippling and shining like ovoid-embedded lava. Beckoning from three hundred three thousand three million planets; aliens.

And so Raunder began to tread, following the call. It was hard, though, like spawning upstream. He swung his dream webs back and forth until his jaws ached, and he didn't get any closer to the call and the fireticks against the far-off blue-black. Who did? Who ever had? Was this not why they built the towers, because their minds were weak and their bodies strong? Was this not why the hairy-tops had crossed the waters in their metal boats?

Inevitably, the paddling made him tired. His rotators burned with the

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acids of the subconscious. He felt the home sphere pull at him, as it always had, and he knew he was no closer to the stars. No one ever got closer; that was the truth of dreams; that was the failing of the sleeping mind. The Tanii were like insects on a leash. Tired, tired; he began to let the stars dissolve, allowing the sweaty physical form to reclaim its sleeping friend. Soon he'd be home to stone bedroom and tree-canopied blackness and wheezing of thirdbrother across the room.

But, contrary to logic, as if mocking the star-call above, he glanced backward. He looked not at the fading stars but at the sphere, and he knew the truth. For the sphere was smaller now, half its former size, a green and blue circle with its purple splotches obscured by distance. The sphere had changed; it was still big but now silly against the dark behind it. Raunder had moved; moved far away, he knew, perhaps many hundred kilometers; even the greatest towers shrink from view after one hikes or canoes for several hours. This was not merely towers. This was the sphere.

His fading mind shivered as the sphere darkened into simple sleep.

The next day Raunder went to Great Mother to tell her of his dream and let the scribes record it. He stood against the granite ovoid at the entryway to the Great Mother's receiving room, his hands and cheeks against the polished coolness. She would see him after she was done with an emissary from Echo Ridge. She would be frightened when she heard of his dream, when she knew that it was distance that was the problem, not the mind-glue of the sphere holding them back. But there had been other revelations of a magnitude as great; for instance, three generations before, Qillyt had dreamed that the sky was a ceiling so high that only the strongest bird could reach it. And, before, they'd thought they could stand on little towers and splash the sky with a rock.

He watched his cousins and his second cousins, his uncles and his aunts, and even some non-related ones, walking through the waiting hall, thunking wooden mugs of percolated hotroot, discussing the hairy-tops, their tails snapping sometimes, their eyes brightening as arguments grew passionate. All of his uncles had the dog pelts now, and here—Xazta, a cousin—he was wearing one of the hairy-tops' shirts! It was foolish looking; too baggy, and it reached down only to the sweeping arches of his rib cage. Raunder laughed, his ears tingling. Tanii should be naked in the warmtime; otherwise, brains will not stay cool. How stupid could his relatives be?

"Next!" Great Mother yelled from the room, her voice bass-pitch deep.

The emissary from Echo Ridge nodded at him as he left. He too had a dog pelt, a sleek yellow one tipped at a rakish angle so that his eyes were nearly covered and his muzzle stuck out like a tongue from a mouth.

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Raunder returned his nod, then stepped into the entryway, between the two granite ovoids.

Great Mother was sitting on her stunted tree, speaking to her guard. Her muzzle was cracked and dried back into a perpetual smile. Her wisdom robes were crimson and thick and covered all her skinny, shrinking body.

She was wearing a glossy dog pelt on her head. A dirty one.

Raunder turned back toward the crowd in the hall, his eyes anger hot. They were still talking, unaware. He stifled a growl and ran for the Great House door.

Three hairy-tops, one with yellow hair and pink skin, one with short hair and obsidian skin, one with a cone of red hair and skin almost the same brown as Raunder's fur, were walking down the cement street. They each carried firearms in metal holders on their chests. They went to a stone house the size of a tomb and knocked on the door. When a Tanii lifted the paper of the door, they pointed their weapons at his chest. The Tanii man could have knocked them down, Raunder was sure, but he bowed instead. The hairy-tops went inside, and came out a minute later, making angry birdsqueak and shaking their heads.

They went to the next house on the street.

Raunder wondered if they were looking for his hairy-top. He hoped they were; then he could get more iron. He could probably haggle, too, maybe get one of their star boats. Right now, he needed bitterfruits. He ran over to the next block, then over the cement bridge crossing Northcreek. He reached the market street a few minutes later. It was busy as it had never been before, with hundreds or maybe a thousand Tanii, many of them speaking odd dialects, buying milk in stone cups, glazed pots for storing urine or keepsakes, quilts with pictures of hairy-top faces, sweet-worms for lunch, copper knives to cut the fur off their muzzles so they could look even more like hairy-tops, parchments with apocryphal hairy-top tales. Raunder passed a vendor stand where seven Tanii were in line for dog pelts. The vendor had them piled like stones in a quarry, a brown mass in a box. There were two more such vending stands farther down the street.

There were so many Tanii that dust rose from the cement and was cloud-trapped by the green canopy above. It was easy for Raunder to grab the basket of bitterfruits.

He made his way out of town by the Council street. The line to see the hairy-tops was a hundred Tanii long, all hoping to get tower sticks. It stretched to the corner of the sandclock shop; then curved down that street for about twenty more Tanii. His dumbest sister Sxandia was

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second to last in line, holding a lapis-lazuli ovoid she hoped to get another stick with.

Raunder pretended he didn't hear her calls.

Raunder and Fidian met for lunch at the cemetery atop Shadow Bark Ridge. The trees were few and the leafy canopy was thin, so they sat in places of sunlight between the skeletons of their ancestors, and grinned as their fur grew warm. Conversation was not so warm.

"My hairy-top's getting better. It's acting rational."

Fidian looked away. She seemed to be looking into the forest, so much darker because their eyes were adjusted to the sun. Or maybe it was the tower of Four-Times-Great Grandmother, the bones so worm-eaten and the structure so shaky that you wondered how the old woman could follow the star-call. Fidian said nothing.

"Hey, you know I can get a lot more iron if it's healthy," Raunder said.

She looked back at him; he could see his reflection, muzzle distorted to obscene size, in her angry gray eyes. "Johthi changed *my* tower plans because of the hairy-tops."

Raunder dug his thumbnails into the dirt. "Well, what can we do about it?"

After a while Fidian's eyes darkened. "Tonight we'll climb Hightower."

That night Raunder and Fidian climbed to the top of Old Hightower. Fidian wanted to dismantle the straight-box work, and throw the wobbly metal rod down to the tree tops. Johthi had already put in the two corner tubes, each twenty meters high, on the north side, plus some triangle supports and a few still-rough crosspieces. Raunder pointed out that throwing the pieces down would tear the purple paper below and possibly break the steps of the ladder. So Fidian shrugged, and they sat down on the plank. They wrestled tails for a while and watched the stars, thick like bird droppings on blackwood.

"I wonder which star the hairy-tops come from." Raunder said.

"You can't see it very well here. You have to go farther north than the Liquid Caves."

Raunder looked to the north, over the triangle support. As the blue of the daytime had faded to black, so too the green had darkened. It was as black and fuzzy as the mosses of decay, except for the flickering flames, rising up through the broad, lightless leaves. Concentrations of flames indicated communities, suggesting that the sphere was more than a round blanket in the star-water.

Flames were rising from one tower. "Look at that," Raunder said.

"What?" Fidian had been trying to light her own fire with the wet wood. She looked and said, "Wildcreek Tower?"

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"Maybe. Looks like a signal fire's out of control."

"No. I think the hairy-tops are burning it."

"How do you know?" asked Raunder.

After a moment, Fidian said, "It's the closest tower to Southcreek."

"Oh. They think the Southcreekers stole the hairy-top?"

"Maybe. Or they're getting frustrated." She took out her sack of bones from her belt. Raunder could barely see them in the starlight; she threw them between her feet, onto the plank. And she began to flip them, shake them, shape them into the signs from the oldest times, the oldest places. Raunder was sure she was doing it by feel, not by sight.

"What're you doing?" he asked at one point, but she ignored him. He watched Wildcreek Tower turn into a torch; it lit up the bowls of the surrounding hillsides, and sometimes when the breeze was right they could hear screams.

Finally, she said, "I integrated the bones. Probabilities. I assume X and Y and hairy-top functions in four dimensional space. Grind the bones, find the answers. Given the hairy-tops' prior performance, I'd estimate there's a eighty percent probability they'll take their search here. You've got to do something with the hairy-top."

"Trade it?"

"No. They'll probably kill you. I've been talking to the northern mathmen. They've seen the hairy-top machines eat the mountains, force communities to relocate. We're not the only unhappy Tanii. What we do is kill your hairy-top, take it north, show the others. You'll be surprised how this'll rouse people. The physical presence of a hairy-top, reduced from its omnipotence. Funny, isn't it?" She laughed, slapping her tail against the plank.

Raunder tried laughing too. But . . . well, he liked the hairy-top. It was like a gorgeous ovoid, split in half and saved for himself. He could imagine himself during Calling Festival, hiding in the cache while others crowded on the towers. "We could bring the hairy-top without killing it. Then it'd last longer, wouldn't it?"

"Dangerous. It'd make noise. We'd have to feed it. And I don't think the message would be very powerful."

"I don't know if I want to kill it." Raunder felt bad hormones soak the marrow of his bones.

A northerly breeze brought the smell of smoke. "You'd better decide soon. Take it back to them if nothing else. Otherwise Old Hightower will burn too."

Raunder felt the sick-heat of the hairy-top even before he pushed the cache-block away. Inside, the room was hot and redolent of piss. There was another smell, like leaf-molt before it bloomed, a smell usually at-

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tractive, but now repugnant because of its source. He sat on the bench and shook a bitterfruit in front of the hairy-top's face. Its eyes were open but the black dots didn't point at the fruit. They pointed at the ceiling, as if the creature were dreaming the star-call while awake. It lips, dry like the muzzle of a Great Grandmother, were opening and closing. Raunder put the fruit down upon the lips, hoping it would bite. But it didn't. It began making noises, doing the birdsqueak in the high frequencies. Place names and sibling songs, perhaps. The one word it said that he could understand was "empty."

Raunder squeezed some water into its mouth with the sponge. Then he cleaned the urine and feces off the legs. He discovered that the new smell was from the wound; the skin, from the crotch-hair to the pitted scar on the abdomen, was turning black, as if the hairy-top were ripening. He cleaned the new pus coming out of the old cuts.

Raunder began to wring the sponge in the bucket of dirty water. Satisfied the sponge was clean, he applied it to the forehead, hoping to draw the heat away. He left the sponge there. Then he sat on the bench for a while, wondering what he should do.

The hairy-tops on the steps of Council building were angry now. They asked everyone if they'd seen the missing hairy-top. Sometimes they wouldn't give pipe, even if the Tanii brought a grate-polished ovoid or an old heirloom parchment. Once, when his cousin Chasqi brought a basket of rare wisdomblooms, they asked him about the hairy-top. Not speaking the aliens' language well, he was hesitant in his, "I don't know." They took him away and he returned the next day. He body was fine but his mind had changed. He was wearing the long shiny pants that the aliens sometimes gave. Raunder thought clothes in warmtime were only good for signal flags.

"You've got to decide," Fidian said, breathing deeply of the air in the cache. "The Forty Fumes! It does smell sweet, now."

"I can't kill it. I'll just keep it down here, I think."

"What?" Fidian turned to him, her eyes white; but not with anger. With fright. She pointed her right hand thumbs at him, as if she were going to pierce him with her nails. "If you don't do something, they'll burn our tower."

"But they've only burned two."

"Small ones. Hightower's bigger than the ones they've burned. They're setting an example."

Right. Why was it so hard to make a decision? Raunder looked down at his hairy-top. It was on its side, sleeping. It hadn't spoken anything intelligible in two days, and was still sick-hot. He felt like a healer living

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in a hollow tree. It was a nice feeling; he wondered if that was his job. Being a thief wasn't really a job. . . .

"Raunder! Quit dreaming!"

"I'm not—"

"Yes you are! Listen, you either tell the hairy-tops, or kill it and we'll set off for the north. If you don't—" her voice was rising into high-pitch range, "—I'll kill it myself."

"It's mine," he said.

Her eyes flamed to whiteness again, so he waved his hands. He said, "All right. I'll take care of it this afternoon."

"What're you going to do?" Fidian asked.

"Just wait. You'll find out."

"This had better be effective."

The hairy-top groaned.

At noon that day heavy rains began to drum against the highest leaves. Raunder wondered if this meant that rainstorm season would be early this year; he ran out into the dirt street in front of his stone house and looked up. He could see the bulges in the thatchwork of the leaves where the water was collecting. It looked as if they'd be getting new wood for the towers a little early this year. He started walking toward Old Hightower; Sxandia was probably on a dry lower level, flirting with the men so they'd feel obliged to give her milk.

The wet rhythm from above stopped before Raunder had completed even one of the circles up the mountain. He shrugged; so it was just a freak storm, perhaps one dreamed up by the hairy-tops. He waved to his relatives as they came outside from their houses, ready to play the waterdrop game. "Play with us," they urged, and he wanted to, but he was repulsed by their dog pelts.

He hurried on, thinking about dreams. He had heard Fidian talk with her smart friends about the reality of dreams. Some said that the web-jump into the star-water was just imagination, and others said that the mind really left the body, using gaps in the water, not brains in the head, as the stuff that did the thinking. But these smart cousins and mathmen and myth interpreters, they'd never considered if dreams could change reality. What if a Tanii had dreamed that the hairy-tops would come, and they did? What if the hairy-tops dreamed that all the Tanii would start loving them, and they did? Most of them—

A distant crack, and three seconds later a waterdrop hit ahead of him, splashing mud on his feet. As if by agreement, others fell down, streaking gray, sometimes bringing finger-length twigs and shreds of veined leaves. Smaller ones, too, hitting him, just fat raindrops. His child-cousin Triani tried running across the street backward. Waterdrops missed him, ex-

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ploding in the dust. Triani was almost across when a big one hit his head. It knocked his dog pelt to the mud and, surprised, his eyes went different colors as he stumbled into his friend's house. He left the pelt.

By the time Raunder found Sxandia creeping along the edge of the road, there was a creek running down the middle. "Raunder!" she cried, as she bumped against the trunk of a tree.

He bowed to her. "You're off work?"

"Yes. The rain's stopped but Johthi already said to go. I'm—"

"Come on with me. I've got something to show you."

"Where?"

"To Old Hightower. I've got something to show you."

Sxandia shifted the shiny material of the leg covers she'd gotten only the day before. They were so loose they had to be bound up by string, and they only reached the middle of her calves. "Later, today. I'm going to grab my tooth. The hairy-tops have come to Old Hightower."

Raunder touched her right forearm. "You must realize, foolish sister, they're not going to trade with you at the tower. And they don't care about an old tooth."

"But they—" She turned away from him, her eyes reddening into sadness. "You just don't like the hairy-tops."

"But I do. Come on with me, and I'll prove I like hairy-tops."

She agreed at length and they started winding up the hill. When they reached the last bend on the road, around the ruined fortress block that was sinking into the vine-hugged ground, they heard shouts, and an amplified hairy-top voice:

"We have reason to believe Doctor Eibsen has been taken to the area of this tower. Please give us any information you can."

Raunder wondered if dreams could really be caught as they followed the star-call, if the hairy-tops waited in the waters, spreading their nets. How else would they know?

As he thought about this, he and his sister made their way into the plaza in front of the tower. The clouds were already gone above them, and he felt his eyes darken because of the sun-brightness. A dozen Tanii were standing at the end of the plaza, next to the main central ladder. They seemed to be conferring with five hairy-tops. The hairy-tops had smoky masks covering their faces, and, as if to mock the pelt-wearing Tanii, round silver hats covering their hair. Raunder's treble ears reflexively tensed as one alien spoke into a silver spoon. "Doctor Eibsen is a specialist whom we value highly. We feel we must demonstrate the seriousness of our intent."

Raunder and Sxandia crossed the plaza, their toes making sucking noises in the moist soil. "This way," Raunder said, pulling on her arm

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as she hesitated near Johthi. The foreman had a bag of trinkets nestled between his feet.

"I want to see what the hairy-tops will do," Sxandia said.

"Nobody's gotten any tubes," Raunder said. He veered to the side of the plaza, where there were trees and old huts so decayed they looked like slothbird nests. He kept tugging at Sxandia; she seemed enraptured by the sunlight and the loud talking device. The afternoon sun penetrated into the forest surrounding the huts, so it was still bright even as they began stepping on the young tree mulch.

"Do any of you know about Doctor Eibsen?" The words echoed through the plaza, as if the trees were cliffs.

"Over here," Raunder said, pointing to the stairwell hut.

"Something in the tunnels?" she asked, her six ears stiff and alert.

"Yes." He started to warn her about the ruins of the fortification wall, which were hard to see and easy to trip over, but the loud voice came again:

"Enough! Take this as a warning!"

Sxandia resisted his pull again, and Raunder tripped over the wall. The young tree mulch cushioned his fall.

"Look!" Sxandia yelled.

Raunder pushed himself to his knees, and crawled around so he was facing back towards the plaza. Through the trees he saw a hairy-top shooting his weapon at the face of the pyramid. It made a pencil flame that made the purple paper steam. The hairy-top moved the flame randomly across the paper, as if making an alien engraving. Yellow flames took sometimes, but died; the paper was still soaked from the rain.

If this wasn't bad enough, the Tanii were crawling on their bellies around the hairy-top with the weapon. They were mumbling dream talk in languages Raunder barely knew and clutching at their dog pelts. The stupidity of their actions was matched only by the confusion of the hairy-tops; they had erased the blackness on their faces and were chattering in birdsqueak.

"No!" Raunder cried, when the hairy-top with the weapon managed to start three rungs of the central ladder on fire. This was enough; he imagined hairy-tops with their naked skin aflame. Screaming. Screaming. He pointed his thumbs to the sun and hunched himself for the sprint.

Sxandia knocked him over from behind. His tongue licked mulch and his eyes folded shut. She had her weight atop him, and he was too surprised to try wrestling her off him.

"*Stupid* brother," she whispered, saliva from her tongue irritating his ears, "do you want to get yourself killed?"

"Let me go!" he said into the humus.

"Are you invincible to flames?"

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"Let go," he repeated, but he knew she was right. She had a good hold on him, at any rate.

"Raunder, go talk to Fidian to see if you can do anything about Hightower. All right?"

"Yes. Yes. Get off, then."

After she let him up, his eyes glared white, but he walked, ear-flat, down the incline from the mulch to the plaza mud, only glancing once at the pyramid as he headed toward the road. Two more rungs were burning.

Raunder's smartest sister Fidian ran up the corkscrew hill to reason with the hairy-tops. Raunder did not see her again that day, but when he went up to Old Hightower the next morning, the fires were dead. Thirty meters of ladder were ashwood, though; gray and chipped and looking as though they would collapse in a strong morning wind. Pieces of burned paper had fallen to the ground, leaving a gap that made the pyramid look like it was yawning. No one had yet come to work on the tower; Raunder imagined they were discussing what to do about the ladder.

Raunder picked up a triangular piece of paper. He looked into the yawning darkness. As he studied the details of the inner pyramid, he scratched, with a pair of thumbnails, his name into the smoke-tainted paper.

"Raunder."

His ears erect, he turned. It was Fidian. Her muzzle was still moist with youth, but he could see where the dry cracks would be. She wore a piebald dog pelt on her head. She smiled at him; hairy-tops, Tanii, they had similar smiles.

After a while he said, "You stopped the fire."

"Yes. They have wise people among their stupid ones. I explained it would be reasonable to stop burning towers. I told them that nightdogs dragged the body of their *anthropologist* away."

It seemed as if she were a child reading words from a difficult parchment. He was tempted to ask the meaning of the birdsqueak sound, but said, "They took you to their settlement."

"Yes. They have many machines. I asked of math and they showed me a lava window which danced stars. I showed them the bones and they took interest. They recorded their observations, and I," she tapped her head with her left far-thumb, "recorded mine."

After a while, he said, "And they gave you a dog pelt?"

Her eyes went from orange to gray. "I bought it in the market. Respect is good."

He could think of nothing to say but, "The ladder needs fixing."

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As if his words had been distorted by the speaking spoon, she said, "They will give me leg covers the next time I see them."

When Raunder next visited his hairy-top, he found that it had died and grown fat, swollen like a leaf after a noontime shower. The smell in the room was so sweet now he almost retched, so, that same night, he carried the hairy-top up through the ancient tunnels to the surface. Though the hairy-top was fat, it was much lighter than before.

Raunder stayed in the forest as much as possible on the way down the mountain, passing houses only when he intersected with the corkscrew road. He took the least traveled bridges across the creeks, then, when he reached the forest the other side of Northcreek, he set the hairy-top down and rested. His arms were sore. He slept for a few minutes, avoiding the star-call, then he started walking again. He walked on twisting mountain roads for a while, heading generally to the north, hiding when other travelers approached. When the dawn came and things weren't as dark, he stayed in the forest.

Soon he was far into the wilderness; the trees fifty meters tall, the birdsqueak nonstop and almost like the hairy-top sounds, the bitterfruit in natural glens. He made himself eat the bitterfruit, feeling sad. Then he came to the sharp rises of the Treachery Peaks. He slowed, climbing carefully through the washouts, putting the hairy-top down before he tested jumbles of stone, pulling himself up by exposed roots, the hairy-top dragging in one arm, stepping carefully along cliffs.

Higher up, there were many sunny places, where no trees could find soil. He reached the top of a small rocky peak and thought it might work. The closest tower was on the horizon to the south, and he wondered if his peak was even higher. If so, even better.

Raunder sharpened stones as the day wore into darkness. When he had a reasonable supply of blades, he slept.

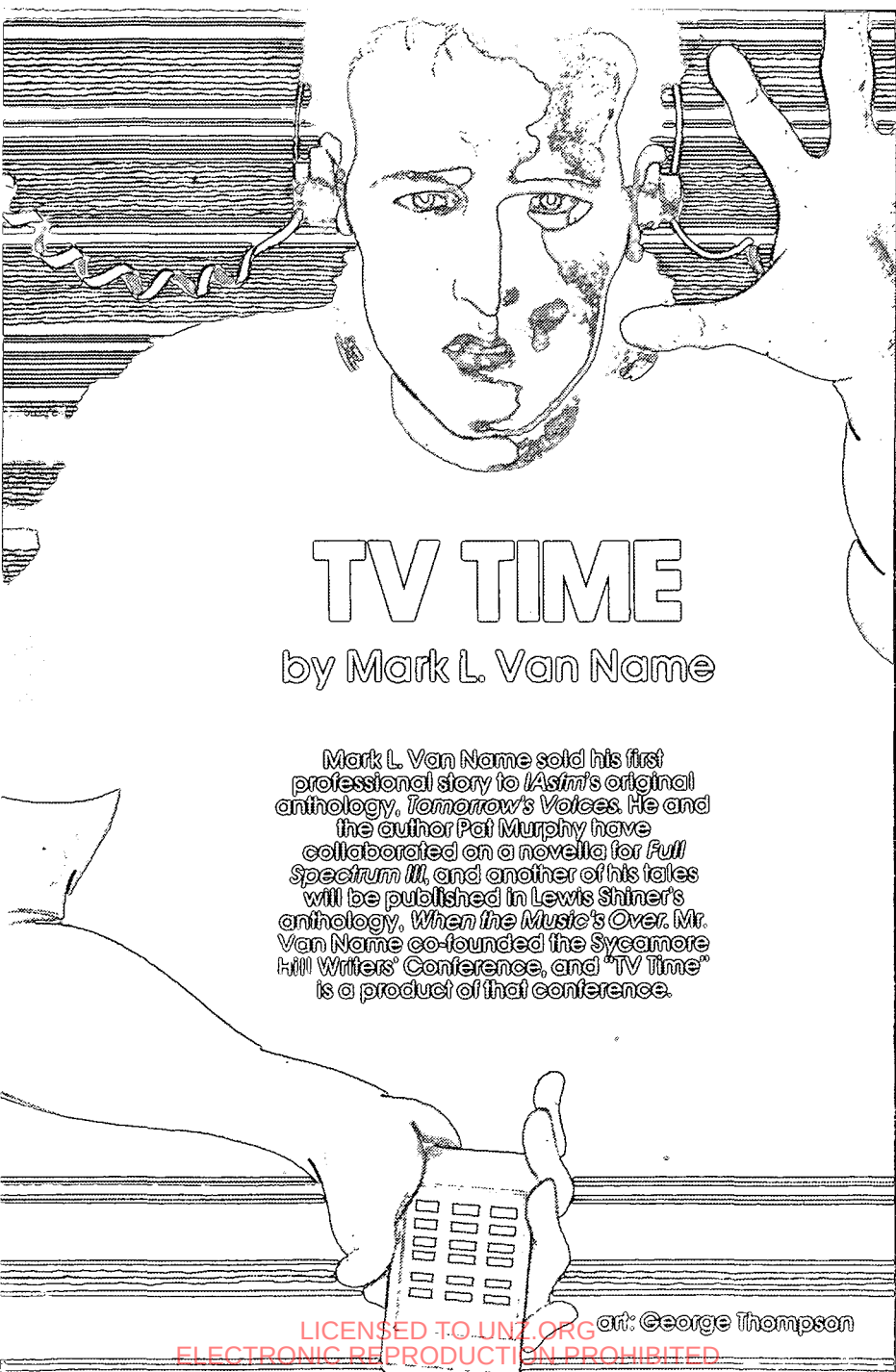
First thing next morning he cut the hair off the hairy-top and set the scalp aside. Then he cut the flesh off the hairy-top; it came off easily. When the bones were freed, he buried the flesh in a pit. Next, with a lava rock he scrubbed the redness off the bones, until they were as cleanly white as his grandmother's.

Raunder took the bones and built a square-box tower, tying it together with long wild grasses. He used the long bones and some of the ribs as main pieces, the hands, feet, and vertebrae bones as supports. It was a narrow tower, as tall as his muzzle; taller with the skull resting on top.

He hoped the hairy-top would be able to answer the star-call now.

Done with the tower, he burned the hair. Then he started to the north. He could look for mathmen. He could be a healer. He knew that he would dream. ●

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TV TIME

by Mark L. Van Name

Mark L. Van Name sold his first professional story to *IAsfm*'s original anthology, *Tomorrow's Voices*. He and the author Pat Murphy have collaborated on a novella for *Full Spectrum III*, and another of his tales will be published in Lewis Shiner's anthology, *When the Music's Over*. Mr. Van Name co-founded the Sycamore Hill Writers' Conference, and "TV Time" is a product of that conference.

art: George Thompson

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I got one good week of summer vacation, and then Dad hurt himself, Mom quit her job, the new hi-def TV arrived, and things haven't been the same since.

Dad's accident started it all. Dad said he never would have had to mess around with those power cables in the first place if the damn hardware group had been doing its job, but he was always ragging on those guys. Dad may be an okay programmer—although I doubt it, I mean, who can believe a guy in his fifties knowing dick about computers—but he's a total hardware loser. So, he's moving his computer to a new office, plugging in the connections on the power box and—boom—megavolts lay him out flatter than day-old road pizza. When he comes to, he's got this twitch that you've just got to see to believe. He'll be sitting on the sofa, or at the dinner table, just as calm as a switched-off TV, and then his hands'll start. His legs usually go next, although sometimes his hips join in first, a sort of Elvis look if you ignore the hands, and then all hell breaks loose. Mom put a seatbelt on his chair after he fell off the third time. The doctor told him that he just has to stick with the muscle relaxers and wait it out.

I say, enjoy it while it lasts. That twitch is awesome. I tried to get him to let me video it and sync him up to some serious metal noise, but he turned red and took the camera away from me for a week. "Ted," he said, "other people's misery isn't funny."

Okay, so it's not funny, but it sure could make great video.

Then Mom quit her job to take care of Dad. She didn't really want to quit, but Dad kept after her. He said that they could afford it, because he was getting full salary on his disability leave, and that he needed an adult around.

Mom tried first to get Grandma and Grandpa to come over, but they were still steamed about that video I made of them in the bedroom. I don't know what the big deal was; I only wanted to see if I could take over the security camera system. It's not like they were doing anything I've never seen before. (After all, Dad is such a truster—he keeps his passwords in a card in his wallet—that I've had the code for the ecstasy channel since I was ten.) Grandma and Grandpa were older, though. Lots older. I'd have been home free if Dad hadn't heard my deck clicking when he got up to pee that night. He took it away, and they swore never to visit again. No big loss, I thought, until Dad got hurt and it brought Mom home to stay.

Things picked up a little when the new TV arrived. What a mother of a display! The Sears guys brought it in rolled up like a carpet. We cleared the wall at the end of the TV room, and then they stood it up and unwound it along the wall. A screen seven feet tall and almost eleven feet long! Plus seven by three foot planar speakers at either end! A wall

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of live-size action, bigger than real, better than real. "Big enough to hold a man," Dad said. In the afternoon sun, with the curtains open, it shimmers like the oil on the Gulf. Get Dad going in front of it, hit it with some fast strobes, and you could make great video without even turning it on.

I was stoked. Videos large as life, the Earcrushers shaking the speakers off the wall mounts—it was gonna be a rattling new world.

Then reality crashed in. Dad and Mom sat on the sofa all day long, their butts leaving prints in their favorite spots, that beautiful display wasted on game shows and soaps, reruns and tired old-network crap. Sure, I watched, too; any video was better than none, better than going outside and trying to breathe that shit that Tampa bills as "the cleanest air in Florida."

Mom was the worst. Start a show with her and you had to watch it all. At first she would get up and mess around with house crap during the commercials, but after a while she stopped all that and stayed with Dad, glued to the sofa.

Dad, though, Dad got wilder as the twitch got worse. Maybe it sped him up. When Mom would go to the kitchen for food, or off to take a nap—she napped a lot after they moved to separate beds, after that morning when she showed up at breakfast with bruises all over her shoulders and head—Dad and I would start the Big Flip.

The Big Flip was my fave. I'd sit on the floor beside the sofa, master remote on my lap, and Dad—from his usual sofa spot—would say go. He was timekeeper; I couldn't count on him to operate the remote for an entire flip. I'd run the dish up to the top satellite, start at channel one, and hit 'em all, every channel, every satellite. New channel, guess the show or movie, settle any arguments with the on-screen program guide, move on. First time through, it took us over two hours; within a week we could check out all three hundred channels in just over an hour. It was great! Non-stop images, no delays, no wait for plot or character crap, just go go go, game show to western to outer space to music vid and on and on.

Mom hated the flip. She would come in and it was back to rerun city. Some of them were okay, like the old space shows and the cop gigs, the ones where you didn't have to wait too long for something to happen, but most were pure death. I kept the six-inch Sony in my lap for when the going got slow. The Sony didn't pick up many channels, but at least it increased my options.

Late at night, though, Dracula time, the TV was mine. I had to use the 'phones so the noise wouldn't bug them, but otherwise I was on my own. The first few nights I fell asleep on the sofa, the screen flashing and the 'phones shooting tangled tunes straight into my brain and down

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my spine, but then Mom threatened to take away the remote and I got better about crawling off to bed before they got up. I learned to play that TV like it was hardwired into me. I got the max twelve splits going at once, different shows flashing all over the screen, its metal vibrating with light. Full-size, half-size, a dozen splits, and back to one, I did it all. Grandma and Grandpa were amazing at almost twice normal size and speed. (Can you believe Dad thought I made only one copy?)

At four or five A.M., when even the screaming light couldn't keep my eyes open, I'd power it all down and crash, eyeballs still twitching under my lids. Then up around noon for lunch. The boring afternoon, deadly prime time, flat beach scum of dry images saved only by occasional Big Flips, and back to Dracula time. That was the rest of June, and into July, until just after the fourth, when Dad walked into the TV.

I still don't know where he got the idea, but it was hot, no doubt about it. Maybe it was the Jap westerns. The Japs love westerns; they have whole satellites full of 'em, new ones and old ones, but mostly old ones—with a twist, of course.

They'd usually start out just like the originals. Old Joe and Hoss would come riding into town to buy a few big bags of Purina horse chow, some guy in a black hat would start beating up on some woman about twice as pretty as anybody else in town, and then—boom—fight time. So far, so good, nothing special. Routine. Just as Hoss was about to land the big one, though, he'd stop and in would ride Hirohito or Toshiro Mifune or God knows who else. You had to admire the Jap programmers; on the good channels you could barely tell the new stuff from the old, no shitty haze lines, shadows falling true, new digital and old analog blending like fresh-from-the-jar Tang. At the end, of course, all the cowboys—Hoss and Joe, Hirohito and Mifune, all of them—would ride off into the big sky. The town folk would be happy, maybe waving from in front of the bar, and there was usually a farm family or two tossed in somewhere, their land safe, their young daughter, eyes as big as CDs, staring at Joe as he rode off.

That ending, said Dad, showed the real beauty of those shows: they had something for everybody. "A man could live in a world like that," he said. Want to stay around the house and farm a little? Go for it. Feel like riding into town and raising Saturday night hell? No problem. Got a hunger to be a good guy? Plenty of room for that, too. Sometimes Dad would walk up to the screen and just stand next to Mifune—Mifune was his favorite. Hoss was too fat, Joe too dumb, Hirohito too damn stiff. He'd look at Mifune and then look at me and Mom. "Couldn't you just see it, Ted? Dear? Couldn't you see me riding into town, high on the saddle?" Mom never said anything; sometimes she'd smile a little. Me, I thought

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he was more the farmer type, all beat down by the sun, stuck on the wagon heading out of town—but I'd usually agree just so he'd sit down. If he stood too long, the twitch would come on him, and then Mom and I had to carry him back to the sofa. He was a no-shit bitch to lift when he was vibrating.

The day he left he was on the sofa watching the end of a particularly good one, a three-parter with the whole ranch gang, even Adam, plus Hirohito and Mifune, this samurai Musashi, Yamamoto in a cameo as a tough foreman, and tons of other guests. The plot seemed to tie in a young cutey who couldn't take her eyes off Joe, her fat old man, some stolen plutonium, and a hot new chip, but who really cared? Shit was happening all over the screen.

When the last commercials before the big wind-up were blasting away, Dad stood up and marched to the screen, back soldier-straight, arms oddly still at his side. He stopped in front of it and turned around. "Dear," he said, looking at Mom, "Ted—" he looked at me "—that's the place for me." He turned, and then looked back at us over his shoulder. "Don't worry, I'll be fine, and so will you. TV'll take care of everything. You'll see." Then he walked right into the screen, like diving sideways into the Gulf but without a splash. There one minute, and then slipped away. I was so surprised I dropped the Sony; damn thing hasn't been right since. Mom didn't move, but she did stop smiling.

When the show came back on, there was Dad, on the steps of the bar, waving goodbye to the boys on the horses. At least he wasn't stuck on the wagon with the farmers. He looked great, better than I'd ever seen him, tall and straight in jeans and a flannel shirt, no gray in his hair, no twitch, waving and grinning like a son of a bitch. For a second or two I swear he turned to look straight at us; Mom even waved back. Then the credits started to roll.

Mom picked up the remote from where Dad had left it and switched off the tube. She sat dead still for a moment. "Well," she finally said, "I think it's bedtime."

I decided that maybe, for a change, she was right.

When I got up the next morning I stayed in my room for a while and dicked around with the Sony, but no luck. I was pretty sure Dad was really gone, but it was a little hard to believe, even for Dad. Finally I figured I might as well check it out myself, so I headed for the kitchen.

Mom was already up, of course, sitting at the counter, drinking her coffee, same as always. The seatbelt straps on Dad's chair hung as calmly as his arms had before he got the twitch. Through the doorway to the den I could see the TV and the sofa. The TV was on—two geek families on *Win a Life* going for an expense-free year by trading stupid-relative

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stories and accident photos—but the sofa was definitely empty. I dropped six spoons of Tang into a glass of water and stirred the glop around. It tastes best when it's like pudding.

Mom looked at me over her cup. "Well, your father's really done it this time. Now what are we supposed to do? I don't think I can get my old job back."

Shit, I thought, I hope you can; I want the house to myself. I wasn't quite sure what to say, though. In the background the TV went to commercials in preparation for the audience round, where some lucky sucker wins a whole year just for being there, no stupid stories or anything, just for showing up and spinning a wheel and getting it to stop in the right place. "I don't know, Mom."

The commercial ended, the show came back, the announcer pulled a big lime card out of this huge bucket, and read off Dad's name. "Mom!" I ran for the TV as Dad came streaking out of the audience. "Mom!" She ran in, too. Dad looked as good as yesterday, but this time he wasn't in western clothes. He was wearing a standard *Win a Life* costume, the kind you needed to get in, a giant fake leaf taped around his waist. Even with green paint all over him he looked great. He smiled at the audience and waved. Mom waved back.

The announcer led Dad over to the wheel. Dad waved once more to the audience and then let 'er rip. It must have spun around a dozen times before it even started slowing down—probably a show record—and then it tick-tick-ticked until the plastic flap stopped right in the middle of the big red cherry.

Mom jumped off the sofa and started clapping. "He won, he won, he won!"

The audience went crazy, everybody screaming and clapping, stamping their feet. When the noise died down the announcer put his arm around Dad. "So, what do you plan to do with this year?"

"Well, Bob," Dad said, "I just want the money to go straight to my wife, the best little woman a man could ever want, and to my boy, Ted. Put it all in their names." Yeah, a mention on national video! Dad was all right. "Bob, could I say a word to my family?"

Bob smiled that big announcer smile and let go of Dad. "By all means." The credits were rolling.

"Dear, I told you everything would work out." Then Dad smiled, and I swear even his teeth looked new. "I hope I'll see you soon."

Mom whispered something, but I couldn't quite hear it. Maybe that's when she got the idea herself.

As the last of the credits flashed up, Dad yelled, "And see you, too, son!" Dad had sure gotten cool in a hurry.

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I looked at Mom. She was in her usual spot on the sofa, her hand resting where Dad would have sat.

"I guess that means you won't be going back to work, huh?" So much for getting the house to myself.

"No dear, I guess not." She smiled. "I think I'll go take a little nap. You keep the TV quiet, okay?"

When I walked by their bedroom later the door was open a little. I peeked through the crack. Mom was sleeping in Dad's bed, her arm around his pillow, a big grin on her face. And they say money can't buy happiness!

Over the next few weeks Dad popped up everywhere. He was on two more game shows—I got a new camera out of one of them—and a bunch of dumb daytime soaps. He hardly ever got his name in the credits, although once, on *Hostile Takeover*, he got a last-line mention when he played a corporate hit man. He was ice in that one, cold and hard and practically dripping action. He killed two of the corporate turkeys before some automatic-security laser cut him in half. He took almost a minute to stop twitching and finally die. His death twitches looked good; I knew that accident would come in handy someday.

That laser shook Mom up a lot, because it was the first time we'd seen Dad die. She walked around the house all day, muttering and half-crying, until he turned up later that night on a Jap western. We still watched at least one of those a day even though Mom didn't like them much. She said it was kind of like a shrine to Dad. She felt a lot better after he made it through that whole show.

I kinda got into the shows where Dad died, because he always died a little differently. One time he'd just fall down, bam, no waiting, no fuss. The next time he'd stretch it out, blood oozing from his lips, his body shaking and sometimes even bouncing around on the ground. My favorite was on one of the old space shows, where they stuck Dad in a red shirt and used this cheap special-effects beam to send him down to a fakoid alien planet that looked like St. Pete beach on a good day. This alien who could have been my language skills' teacher's brother hit Dad with an orange ray, and Dad got to shake and rattle for a fair time before he died.

Now that Dad was gone, we mostly watched what Mom wanted. Her favorites were the hospital shows, where every other patient has some rare disease that even the diagnostic computer has never heard of. Mom loved them, but I couldn't stand 'em—how could you believe that some human doctor would know about Paraguayan black tongue disease if the computer didn't?

One day Dad turned up as a guest doctor on one of Mom's favorites,

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Medicine and Magic, a show that spiced up the usual hospital crap with a doctor who had learned voodoo in Haiti as a boy and wasn't afraid to use it. Pretty cool, as hospital shows go.

Dad looked great. He had on a white shirt, oil-slick black pants, and a white, open lab coat with shiny medical shit in every pocket. Mom watched him every second of the few minutes he was on. She wouldn't even get up to go to the bathroom during the commercials. "Imagine," she must have said three or four times, "your father, a doctor."

When the show was over, she went into the bedroom. I figured she was probably getting ready for a nap, so I put on the 'phones and switched to a pure-vid channel.

A few minutes later I felt a tap on my head. I pulled off the 'phones. Mom was standing there in a work suit, makeup on, ready to head out even though it was the middle of the night.

"Ted, I know you'll be fine. When you need money, you can sign the checks and deposit them. If you get in trouble, call Grandma and Grandpa."

I didn't know what to say. Mom grabbed the remote and flipped around until she found another time zone's feed of *Medicine and Magic*. The Haitian doctor was sacrificing a chicken when a family of nine geeks—four grandparents, the works—walked in to thank the voodoo man for saving their little girl. Mom put down the remote.

"Bye, dear."

So I said, "Bye." What else was I supposed to do? Then she walked into the TV, into the doctor's office behind the geek family, and waved goodbye to me as the credits rolled. I waved back until the screen changed and the commercials started.

I walked over to the sofa and looked down. Still two buttprints.

The commercial was this gross one for borrowing money with organs as collateral, so I scooped up the remote and switched to a metal station. I started to put on the 'phones, but then I figured, what the hell? Who's to hear? I unplugged and cranked it up to wall-shaking max. I would have turned it louder if I could have.

The house was hopping for the next few days. I put tin foil on the windows so the light wouldn't screw up the TV picture, and I watched what I wanted, when I wanted. I slept with the tube on, sometimes on the floor in front of it, sometimes in my room. Without the tube I never would have known what time it was. Not that I cared.

After a while, though, the food started running out. I thought about going out for groceries, or maybe even calling Grandma and Grandpa, but who could live with them? Sharing the screen with Mom and Dad

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had been bad enough, but who knows what senile shit those old farts would want to watch.

Meanwhile, Dad and Mom were all over the channels. Mom now looked as young as Dad, and almost as good, as good as your own Mom can look. I programmed the tube to search for their names in credits, so it let me know whenever they were on. Of course, I'm sure I missed a lot of minor spots, but Dad seemed to be getting more credit lines these days, and Mom started out faster than he did, so I got to see them plenty. They weren't in the same shows very often, but every now and then they'd end up together holding hands as the farmers on a Jap western, or picking up their stolen car from a cop lot. They smiled a lot, held hands, even kissed. They always waved if they could. My name didn't come up much, because they hardly ever got to talk, but I did get two more mentions. Four times on national video and the summer was only half over!

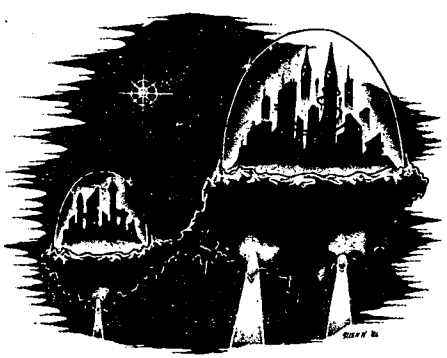
Still, when I ran out of Tang and the frozen dinners were gone, it was clear I had to do something. When you think about it, it really wasn't too hard to decide.

I chose that old space show, the one where Dad got ray-gunned while wearing the red shirt. It was on about ten channels; I picked an episode where some kid with mondo eyebrows had big-time mental powers. Dad and Mom weren't on that one, but I figured the kid could use a buddy, so I walked on in.

I was on my fifth spot before I finally ran into Dad. He was hanging out in the bar in a Jap western, and I was delivering a message for Hoss. During the commercial he pulled me over and gave me a big hug. He told me that he and Mom would be together on a show over on the X3 satellite later that day.

Then he leaned real close and whispered in my ear. "Ted, I think if we play our cards right, we'll get a show of our own someday."

All *right.* ●



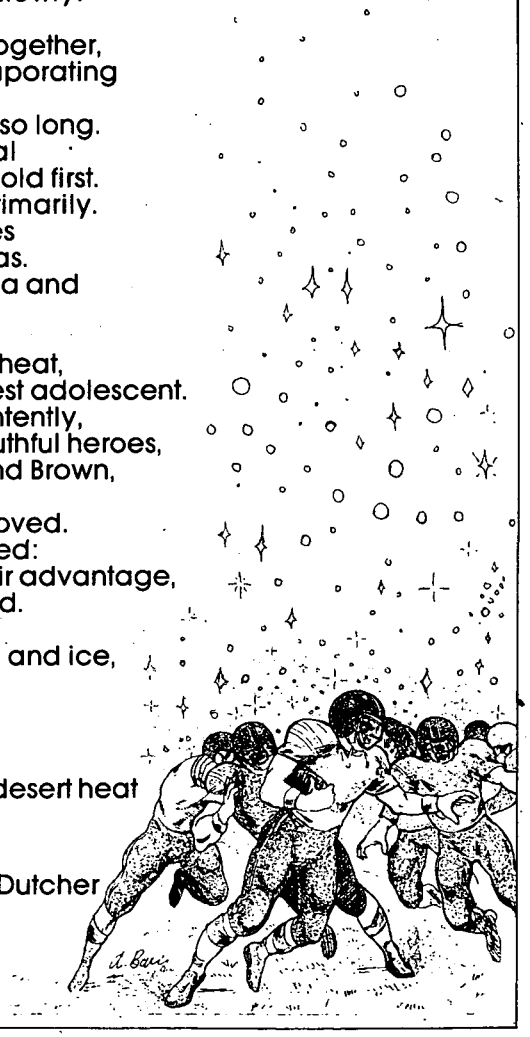
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1967 NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME REMEMBERED AFTER AWAKENING FROM CRYOGENIC SLEEP

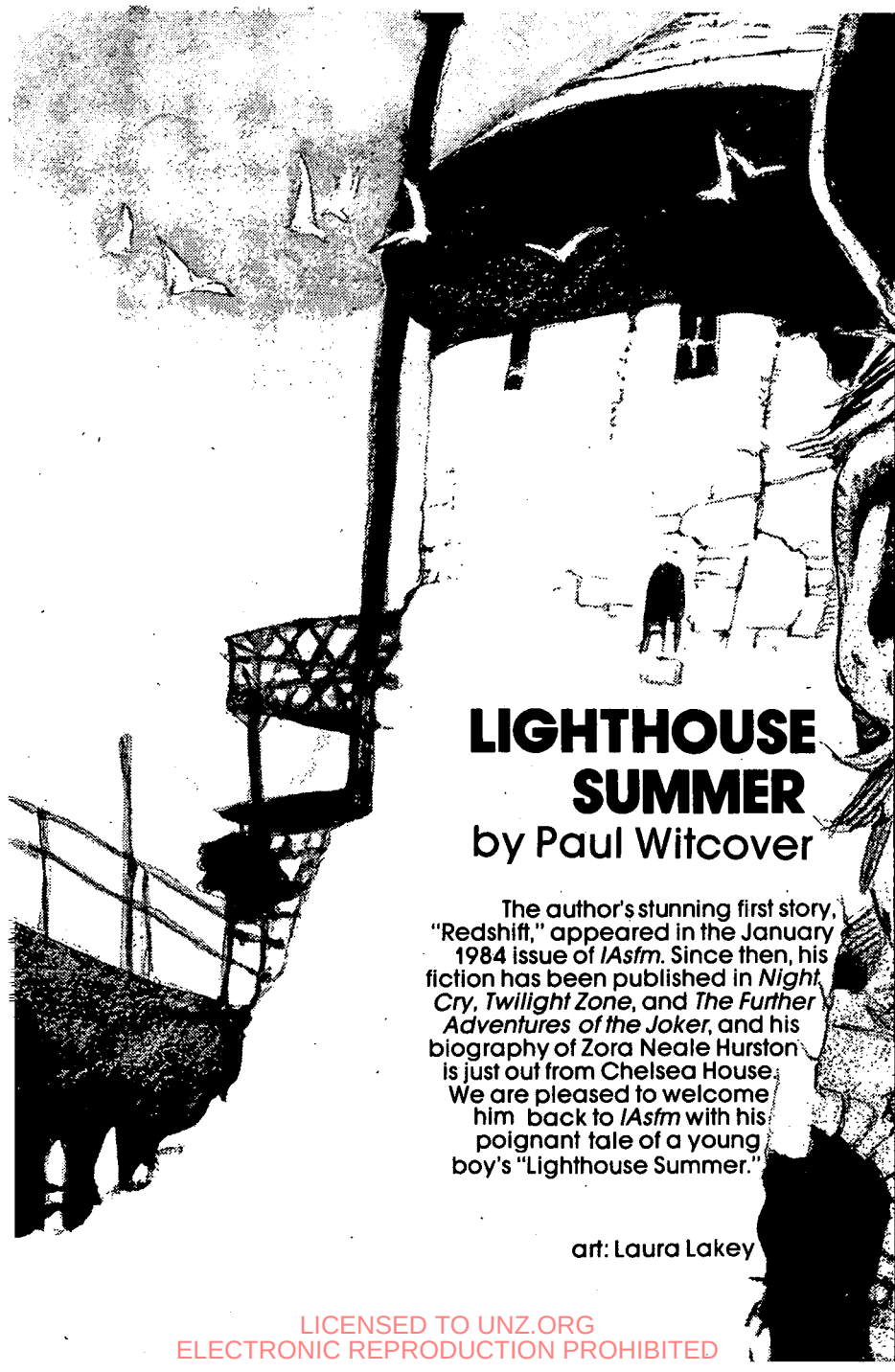
for Bob Frazier

The memories surface slowly:
ice crystals sparkling,
blinding, shimmering together,
others melting and evaporating
in the new heat
of synapses firing after so long.
They say it is not unusual
to recall memories of cold first.
I remember the heat primarily.
And that all my relatives
were cheering for Dallas.
We were visiting Arizona and
I wanted it to be cold.
Christmas and football
were not meant for the heat,
at least not for a midwest adolescent.
I watched the screen intently,
sweating, while my youthful heroes,
Starr, Kramer, Wood, and Brown,
fought not only Dallas,
but the elements they loved.
My relatives complained:
Green Bay has an unfair advantage,
you are used to the cold.
After the win,
my soul filled with wind and ice,
I went out to laugh
in a yard of stones,
longing to stoop
make a snow ball
and hurl it through the desert heat
to hit the sun.

—Roger Dutcher



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LIGHTHOUSE SUMMER

by Paul Witcover

The author's stunning first story, "Redshift," appeared in the January 1984 issue of *IAsfm*. Since then, his fiction has been published in *Night Cry*, *Twilight Zone*, and *The Further Adventures of the Joker*, and his biography of Zora Neale Hurston is just out from Chelsea House. We are pleased to welcome him back to *IAsfm* with his poignant tale of a young boy's "Lighthouse Summer."

art: Laura Lakey

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When I was eleven, just a year after the sea took my father, leaving us nothing to bury but what he had left behind on that treacherous morning of clear blue skies—empty shoes, loose change, limp clothing haunting closets, and the memory of a smile that clove my heart like a beacon—my mother woke me one night with the news that she had decided to marry Walter Hooper.

Framed by the weak light spilling past my doorway from the hall, she perched rigidly on the edge of my bed as if afraid the mattress might prove porous as quicksand, her frail silhouette slight as a shadow yet hotter than the center of a star. She breathed softly, waiting for me to say something. But I was determined not to give her that satisfaction, wanting to punish her for what seemed as much a betrayal of me as of my father.

"Mark . . . ?"

Ignoring her, I turned away, unable to forgive a weakness I could not understand. Stars glimmered outside my window with an aloofness I tried to emulate. A strong breeze was blowing from the sea. I felt a light touch on my shoulder, a shy pressure to which I returned a stony indifference, until it was withdrawn.

Her weight lifted from the mattress, but she did not go; I felt her standing above me, the pressure of her gaze a hundred times heavier than her touch, a thousand times more difficult to bear than her voice. And then she spoke again.

"I want you to know I don't love him. No man can take your father's place. But I have to do what's best for you now, honey. I'm thinking of you. I know your daddy understands. Walter . . . Mr. Hooper is a fine man. Your daddy respected him. He'll treat you right, as if you were his own. I promise."

I knew all about Mr. Hooper. He wasn't really an old man, but he seemed like one to me then: his skin rough and wrinkled, his movements slow and deliberate, even his words cautious. He smelled old. He'd been after my mother ever since my father died, fishing for her with the same dull persistence that he fished the waters off Cape Henlopen. He was a gentle man, lonely, a widower with no children who, insisting I call him Walter, would sit me down from time to time and show me how to tie knots my Boy Scout manual had never heard of, his thick, blunt fingers, usually so stiff and clumsy, threading the rope with a thoughtless grace I envied desperately. At that moment I wished him dead, concentrating on that thought so I would not have to acknowledge my mother.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, I heard her sigh deeply. Then I felt her lips brush my cheek, hot and wet with tears that rolled down my face and neck. I wanted to brush them away, but didn't dare move until she had left the room, closing the door softly behind her. And then,

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to my utter surprise, with no more warning than the Northeaster that had drowned my father, a storm of tears burst from my eyes. Pressing my face into the pillow, I wept as if there was an ocean inside me trying to get out.

Mr. Hooper practically lived at our house after that. He was there when I went to bed, was seated at the table when I got up for breakfast. He walked gingerly, padding softly through the house in his thick white socks as if expecting the floor to buckle at every step. His dull gray eyes were clouded with an immense reserve; he never looked directly at me, seeming to think me too fragile to bear his glance without bruising. I got the feeling that I was interrupting something whenever I came upon Mr. Hooper and my mother; the silence that arose had a dangerous edge, punctuated by sudden attempts at speech that, as often as not, ended in an embarrassed cough.

School was out for the summer, and as soon as I was excused from the breakfast table I would take off for the old lighthouse on Cape Henlopen, an hour's walk across the dunes and up the beach. My mother had forbidden me to play there, afraid that the listing wreck, abandoned for more than fifty years, would topple at the slightest breeze into the ever-advancing sea. But that dilapidated tower, romantic and mysterious as the ruins of a storybook castle, exercised an irresistible allure, as if its long-extinguished lamp were still ablaze in a nest of mirrors, beckoning to me with one long finger of light.

From the observatory, which I reached by means of a rickety spiral staircase, I would gaze past the shattered windows out over the sparkling water—the keening of the wind loud in my ears, the tower swaying gently to give the illusion of motion—until my eyes could no longer distinguish the thin line separating sea and sky. There I could be alone with my fantasies of pirates and spaceships or, unable to forget the reality awaiting me at home, plot elaborate schemes of escape and revenge, equally fantastic. It was there that I met, one day in late July about a week after my mother had accepted Mr. Hooper's proposal, the Captain.

There had been a furious storm the night before, huge thunderheads sailing in like immense gray battleships that opened fire with all their guns once the sun went down. For hours we had huddled in candlelight, the power gone, the house shaking like a frightened animal under the barrage of thunder and lightning as rain pelted the roof with such force it seemed the sky had been ripped asunder.

Coming over the dunes that morning, the storm's detritus all around me, I stopped short in astonishment at the thin trail of oily smoke rising from behind the lighthouse to smudge the blue sky. In an instant, the stark and comforting solitude of the place was shattered; a huge disap-

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pointment gnawed at my heart, as if my last consolation had been torn from me. I was a little frightened, yet I was also angry—curious, too—and so I approached from the sea side, intending to circle around and spy on whoever had usurped my refuge. Gulls challenged me with mocking squawks I hoped would not betray my presence, pacing me obliquely, their cruel yellow eyes watching me sideways with a hunger that always made me think of dinosaurs. To my left, the surf rolled in precise as clockwork, crashing with a dull wallop and hissing over the sand.

The lighthouse loomed white as bone against the sky, perched at the edge of a precipice and tilted at an angle that seemed impossible to sustain. The foundation showed plainly through the sand, an irregular mass of cement and rusty iron rods upon which scattered clumps of bleached-out grass had somehow found a precarious purchase; below it, high tides had scooped out a yawning cavern that threatened to undermine the entire structure. That close, the bulk of the tower obscured the smoke, and for a moment it seemed again as ancient and innocent as my imagination had made it. Then the wind shifted. I smelled bluefish frying.

I crept around the tower, sliding in the sand that rose steeply toward the landward side. I wondered who could be cooking here; there was no sign of a boat or jeep, no sounds of a party. It was slow going, but finally I was close enough to hear the sizzle and pop of the fire. Hugging the wall, I stuck my head out for a peek.

Sitting on a cinderblock before a small fire kindled from the splintered, rotting remains of the keeper's house, a shack that had been crushed over the years by the shifting sands as if slowly squeezed by a giant's fist, was the strangest man I had ever seen. His back was to me, but even so I could tell he was an old man by the stoop of his bony shoulders, upon which a faded and tattered shirt hung loosely, flapping like a scarecrow's garment. His head was sunk in the hollow between his shoulder blades, as if the hat he wore, a navy blue cap of the type favored by weekend sailors, were made of iron. I could hear him muttering to himself in a low, gruff voice like a man clearing his throat as, with one finger, he gingerly poked the contents of a pan suspended above the fire on a grill propped between two cinderblocks. He looked for all the world like the victim of a shipwreck, marooned by some terrible irony in the shadow of the very lighthouse responsible for his fate. In my astonishment, I completely forgot to remain hidden and stepped out into plain view.

Without turning, as though he had been aware of my presence all along and, what's more, had been expecting me, the old man called out in a clear and friendly voice, "Well, Mr. Sharp. So you've got here at last. Come and eat with me."

I looked around wildly for Mr. Sharp, expecting to see him emerge at

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any second from the lighthouse. But there were just the two of us. The old man turned to face me. I braced myself as he stood, ready to run.

Though his legs straightened, his back seemed to grow more bowed, so that he was scarcely taller than when he had been seated. I saw now that he was dressed in the remnants of a uniform trimmed with golden braid. His blue cap had a silver anchor blazoned above the ragged brim; gold laurels festooned the flukes. Long wisps of white hair emerged from under the cap in an unruly tangle. He seemed to regard me in puzzlement, his head tilted at an angle that accentuated his sunken cheeks, as though peeking at me from around a corner, astounded to find me here instead of Mr. Sharp.

"Mr. Sharp," he said after a moment, his voice gone hard and petulant. "Have you been drinking again? Don't you recognize your Captain? Come here at once!"

I took a step forward. "I'm not Mr. Sharp, sir," I called.

"What impudence!" The Captain stamped his foot, then shook his head sadly. With a shrug of his shoulders, he turned away and sat down on the cinderblock again. "Go hungry if you like, Mr. Sharp. I don't care."

The breeze blew another whiff of the bluefish my way. Cautiously, I walked over to the fire, dragging a cinderblock to a spot directly across from the Captain; with the fire between us, I felt fairly safe.

The Captain looked up with a knowing smile and chuckled. "You never could resist bluefish, Mr. Sharp."

"Yes, sir," I agreed. His gaze seemed fixed on a spot behind and above me; white as sea foam, his eyes were occluded by cataracts like encrustations of salt. It was a wonder he could see at all. He struck me then as a sad but comical figure, a cross between Popeye and Mr. Magoo, a fitting keeper for the blinded lighthouse at his back.

The fish was delicious, fried with scallions of a sort I had never tasted before. As we ate, the Captain continued to address me as Mr. Sharp. I assumed that he was an old man reliving his past, an escapee perhaps from some seamen's rest home or mental institution. I soon lost all fear of him, entering into his fantasy as if it were one of my own.

"More fish, Mr. Sharp?"

"Aye-aye, sir."

Mostly he talked of things I could not understand, of ships and storms, of far-off lands and the strange people who inhabited them.

"Remember the *Dorcas*, Mr. Sharp? Now there was a fine ship! The finest to ever sail the seven seas!"

"That she was, sir."

He never mentioned his name to me; he was, and always would be, simply the Captain. Listening to him speak, alert for any allusions to his recent history, I got the impression that he had been at the lighthouse

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for years, invisible until now. He had certainly made himself at home there—when we finished eating, he took me inside; a hammock was strung in one corner, pots and pans hung from hooks in the walls, old books were stacked on a table in the center of the room, beside the spiral staircase leading up to the observatory. There were shelves lined with cans of soup and vegetables, a box stuffed with kindling and a sack filled with onions and potatoes. He had even hung rude curtains cut from burlap over the empty windows. I followed him up the stairs.

In the observatory, he faced the open sea. The breeze feathered his white hair, and it was easy to imagine him on the bridge of the *Dorcas*, sailing bravely into unknown waters. He took a deep breath, then turned to me, seeming, as always, to be looking at someone creeping up behind my back; his sideways glance and hunched posture reminded me of nothing so much as the gulls that had paced me as I walked to the tower. He cocked his head at an even more unlikely angle, then pointed to his clouded eyes.

"Can't see worth a damn," he said matter-of-factly. "You can't sail with your nose, Mr. Sharp. No, not even I can do that. So they retired me. Retired. And here I am, come to the very edge of land but still not afloat, no, even though this old lighthouse sways like a mast on gentle seas, even though if I close my eyes the wind in my face makes me think I'm sailing. Well, there's no help for it. I'd hoped for something different once. Did you ever hear me speak the name of Willis?"

"No, sir," I answered.

He sighed, and seemed to grow older still. "Willis was a girl I knew long ago. Eyes the color of the sea. I don't mean blue, Mr. Sharp. No, not just blue but every color in the seven seas. The angry gray of sudden storms, the placid blue of calm waters ruffled by a fair breeze, the steaming, turgid yellow of tropical latitudes, the deep and murky green off the coast of Africa. We were to be married once."

"Sir?"

"Are you married, Mr. Sharp? I can't recall."

"No, sir."

He nodded. "It's a luxury for young sailors but a comfort, I think, in our old age. Willis died before our wedding. Drowned at sea, like called to like. And I never missed her once until now; I can't remember the color of her hair, the sound of her voice, the look and feel of her. Only her eyes. You see, though I didn't know it at the time, I was marrying her not for love but because of her eyes, not for any present comfort but for my old age away from the sea, so that, in her, something of the sea would be left to me. Perhaps that was wrong of me. Selfish." He sighed again. "Forgive me, Mr. Sharp. There's not much left for me now but

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memories and regrets. It was kind of you to come visit your old skipper. Will you be shipping out soon?"

"Not until September, sir," I said, thinking of the start of school.

"Then perhaps you will pay me another visit."

"I will, sir," I promised. With a tired salute, he turned back to the open window, his back bowed with the pressure of years and disappointments but his gaze steady for all that, sweeping the horizon as if in search of a distant, fabled shore.

In the days and weeks that followed, I went to see the Captain as often as I could, bringing knicknacks from home I thought he might appreciate, old things of my father's that I knew no one would miss: a rod and reel, an oil lamp, an oilskin slicker. I brought fresh water in soda bottles, used my allowance to buy him six-packs of Coca-Cola and fresh oranges. Although my mother suspected that I was disobeying her and playing at the lighthouse, she seemed unwilling to disturb the peace that reigned over our home, a peace as precarious as the lighthouse itself. My mother and Mr. Hooper were to be married at the end of September, and even though they were planning a simple ceremony, performed by a Justice of the Peace, there was much that needed to be done. They had no patience with my sullen and resentful presence, and though they knew that they would have to deal with it before the wedding, they preferred to postpone that day of reckoning as long as possible, which suited me just fine.

Arriving at the lighthouse, I would call out: "Mr. Sharp reporting for duty, sir! Permission to come aboard."

The Captain would poke his head out the door or peer down from the observatory. "Granted, Mr. Sharp. What have you brought today?"

And I would present him with some candles, or some kitchen matches, or some milk. Best of all he liked citrus fruits, which he accepted with a wide smile: "Scurvy, you know. Can't be too careful."

We spent whole days wandering the beach like Robinson Crusoe and Friday. It was as if we truly were marooned on a deserted island, for though I constantly worried that someone would stumble across the Captain and take him away, return him to the home or institution from which he had escaped and in so doing rob me of my best and only friend, we never saw another soul, not even so much as a sail or plume of smoke on the horizon. If airplanes passed overhead, we did not notice them; our eyes were fixed on the sand, where we found the strangest things washed up: coconuts, shattered ceramic dishes that we painstakingly glued back together at the lighthouse, bits of colored glass, smooth as opals, that were warm to the touch and glowed in the dark like fireflies. Once we found a dead fish like nothing I had ever seen; it was the size of a small dog, its fat body covered with dark quills, its mouth gaping widely to

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reveal row upon row of needle-sharp teeth. The Captain insisted that we bury it. "Poison," he said, and shivered as if at an unpleasant memory.

The Captain was the most marvelous fisherman I had ever seen. He made his own lures, which he never failed to spit on before casting. Thus primed, it took scarcely any time at all for a fish to strike; suddenly the rod—my father's—would bend, the line taut and glistening in the sun as the Captain, laughing, his spine bent to an even greater degree than the rod he held, waded into the surf to claim his prize.

About the middle of September, the Captain began to get the lighthouse ready for winter even though we were in the midst of a heat wave that had stretched unbroken since the end of August—long, scorching, rainless days the likes of which no one could remember, nights dry and endless as deserts of black sand. Meanwhile thunderheads kept rolling in, turning the sky the color of the Captain's eyes. Behind that dense curtain, opaque as quartz, the best the sun could manage was a wan yellow light; after sunset, weird greenish flickerings ran through the sky like a fever. The petulant grumblings of thunder never ceased for an instant. People were irritable, glancing up nervously every few seconds even as they made jokes about the weather or placed bets on when the first raindrop would fall. At home, my mother and Mr. Hooper seemed to feel the weather was a bad omen for their marriage; for the first time, they argued in front of me, and I began to have hopes that the wedding, now two weeks away, would be called off.

School had started weeks before, but I had yet to attend a single class. Carrying my books under one arm, I marched off to the bus every morning only to cut across the dunes once I was out of sight, running as though Mr. Hooper were right behind me. When I arrived at the lighthouse, breathless, the Captain would be hard at work installing shutters he had hammered together with nails I had brought from the hardware store or patching the roof above the observatory with shingles pulled from the wreckage of the keeper's house. Side by side we worked through the day, stopping only to eat a meal of fruit and whatever fish the Captain had caught that morning. Then, when it was time for school to let out, I would say goodbye and head back home.

Looking back, it seems amazing that I got away with this careless deception for as long as I did . . . though certainly no more amazing than the fact that, until the very end, no one discovered the Captain was living at the lighthouse. It was as if the lighthouse protected us, casting its blinding light into the eyes of anyone who chanced to look our way. But I suppose even then I knew it could not go on forever. And, sure enough, one Friday afternoon my mother was waiting for me in the kitchen with Mr. Hooper.

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I let the screen door slam behind me, my usual shouted greeting of "Mom, I'm home!" dying on my lips at the sight of their stern, disappointed faces turned in my direction. Though my heart quailed, I managed a weak, uncertain smile.

My mother and Mr. Hooper were seated at the kitchen table, a pitcher of iced tea between them. For a moment no one moved, the only sound a low growl of thunder that seemed to come from deep in the earth. Then, as if arriving at a sudden decision, my mother stood, the sound of her chair scraping across the floor as shrill as fingernails drawn down a blackboard. I winced despite myself and took a half-step toward the door.

"How was school today?" my mother asked in an icy calm voice, her hands smoothing the front of her dress.

How much did she know? I glanced quickly at Mr. Hooper, hoping to find some clue there, but his wrinkled face wore a pained expression that told me nothing, and his eyes stubbornly refused to meet my own. I shrugged. "Okay," I said.

I had not thought my mother could move so fast. In an instant she had me by the arm, her grip so tight that my books crashed to the floor. I squirmed to free myself, but she only squeezed me tighter. "How dare you lie to me," she said.

I was on the verge of tears, more from the sound of her voice and the look in her eyes than the pain of her grip.

"Mr. Rowan called today. The principal. He said you haven't been to class once since school started. Not once! Do you have any idea how that makes me look? Do you?"

She shook me with each question. I did not know how to answer.

"No, you don't care about me. Only about yourself. You know this isn't an easy time, but do you try to help out, do you make the slightest effort to be a help to me? You don't raise so much as your little finger! What's gotten into you, Mark? Answer me!"

I was afraid that if I opened my mouth I would start to cry. The best I could manage was, "I don't know."

" 'I don't know.' And where have you been playing hooky every day? Do you know that? You damn well better! Down by the lighthouse?"

"No," I said.

"You're lying." And then my mother hit me for the first—and only—time in her life. It came out of nowhere, a slap that left the side of my face burning. I could hold back the tears no longer.

"Mary!" I heard Mr. Hooper's chair scrape back.

"Stay out of this, Walter," she warned. Then she addressed me, her hand raised as if about to deliver another slap. I saw that she was crying as much as I was. "For the last time, have you been playing hooky down by the lighthouse? I want the truth now."

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All I could think of was protecting the Captain. "No," I sobbed.

The anger seemed to drain out of her all at once with my denial; her hand dropped, and she let me loose.

Suddenly Mr. Hooper was there, one arm around my mother's waist. "Your mother's doing what she thinks best for you, Mark," he said.

"She doesn't love you, Walter," I sneered. "She told me so."

He stiffened at that. Anger rekindled in my mother's face. "You ungrateful . . . Go to your room. Now!"

I ran past them, glad to escape. I slammed the door to my room and threw myself down in bed, crying with shame and anger. I knew I had said something terrible, and though a part of me regretted it, another part of me gloated at the wound I had inflicted. Faintly, from the kitchen, I heard Mr. Hooper and my mother shouting. I listened for a while, straining to make out the words, which grew more and more indistinguishable from the rumblings of thunder overhead, until I realized, with a start, that I had fallen asleep and woken in the middle of a storm.

There was a plate of cold rice and chicken on the night table beside my bed. A glass of tepid milk. Outside my window lightning flashed with manic intensity, illuminating a world of wind and water in which there was no up or down or sideways. The house shivered with each blast of thunder, and I thought fearfully of the Captain, riding out this tempest in the battered lighthouse. I pictured him high in the observatory, his face hard into the wind, my father's oilskin slicker flapping about his crooked body like a tent come loose from its moorings. There he stood, immovable as a rock, gripping the window ledge as if sailing the lighthouse straight into the teeth of the storm.

When I woke the next morning, the sky outside my window was thick with clouds the color of ugly bruises. The thunder sounded muffled and peevish in the stuffy air, which was damp as the inside of a hothouse. No breezes blew. It felt like the uneasy lull between battles. There was no calm, no peace, no sense of relief. Just a feeling of helplessness that swelled with each growl of thunder and flash of lightning until I could not bear to be alone another second.

I jumped out of bed and—not bothering to change out of the clothes I had fallen asleep in—went to the kitchen, where, as usual, I expected to find my mother and Mr. Hooper. It was company I hungered for, not breakfast, and despite our differences I knew the pressure of the impending storm would not seem so crushing and fearsome a burden with them to share it.

But they were not in the kitchen. There was a note on the table from my mother: she and Mr. Hooper had gone out. They would be back by

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afternoon, when, as she put it, "we need to have a talk, the three of us." She told me to stay home, as the storm might break at any moment.

It was only then that I remembered the Captain. A terrible foreboding gripped my heart, and for an instant I pictured him lying broken and bloody among the stones of the tumbled tower, calling out in a weak voice for his faithful Mr. Sharp. Scarcely pausing to grab an apple and glance at the clock above the sink—it was almost ten—I rushed headlong out the door.

As I ran toward the lighthouse, the carnage the storm lay everywhere around me. Trees had blown over; parts of people's roofs had been carried away then deposited on the dunes as though the rest of the house were still attached, submerged beneath the sand. Here and there I encountered the mangled forms of gulls and, once, a huge black bird I did not recognize, whose leathery wings, even in their ruined state, stretched farther than I could stretch my arms. I stopped for a minute, marveling, then ran on.

Coming over the last dune, I saw the lighthouse standing upright as if by force of will alone. Its base all but destroyed, the tower slumped seaward with a curve reminiscent of the Captain's crooked posture. The slightest breeze, it seemed, would serve to bring the whole structure crashing down into the surf that lapped at its wrecked foundations. Even as I watched, I thought I saw it sway in a gust. There wasn't a minute to lose. I ran up the beach, shouting for the Captain at the top of my lungs, my voice barely audible over the twin booms of surf and thunder.

Then I saw the Captain himself hurrying down the beach to meet me, my father's oilskin slicker flapping around him like the wings of a huge, dark bird struggling to rise. Lost within its deep folds, he seemed hardly to touch the sand at all, as if a sudden wind had swept him up, blowing him along like a candy wrapper across a parking lot. He came to a stop before me, one arm hugging the slicker to his body, the other holding his cap in place. Long strands of white hair were whipping about his face, causing him to squint more than usual as he peered up at me with a sidelong glance that, as always, seemed directed somewhere behind and above me.

"She's come back to me, Mr. Sharp," he said excitedly. His clouded eyes shone with a diffuse yellow light, as if a flash of lightning had been trapped there, ricocheting back and forth with ever-waning intensity inside a cluster of crystals.

I took no notice of his words, speaking at almost the same time in a voice as excited as his own. "It's not safe here anymore, Captain. You've got to clear out, come home with me."

"She's as sound as a rock," the Captain declared over a roll of thunder. "I'd as soon abandon a child."

"But the storm . . ."

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"Bah! We've seen worse, eh Mr. Sharp? Remember that time rounding the Cape of Good Hope? Or in sixty-seven, the typhoon that nearly sank us in the China Sea? Besides, I can't leave now. Didn't you hear? She's *come back to me*!"

For the first time, I registered what he was saying. "She?"

"Why, man, it's Willis I'm speaking of! Who else?"

It took a moment for me to place that name. Then my jaw dropped. "You mean . . ."

He nodded furiously, then, impatient, seized my arm in a grip that made my mother's seem fragile, pulling me toward the lighthouse as he related what had happened. The words rushed from him in a confused torrent I could barely follow.

"It was late last night. The height of the storm. I was in the observatory, looking out into that maelstrom for any sign of a ship in distress. I could see nothing, but I felt ships out there, whole crews bravely struggling for their lives as the world came to pieces around them, afraid and lonely but determined to live and, failing that, to die like men. What I wouldn't have given then for oil enough to light the old lamp! We know, you and I, how welcome is even the most feeble flicker of light from shore on a stormy night, when hope and despair alike have been washed overboard. It's a sight that steadies the shakiest heart like a slug of brandy and warms the coldest limbs like a roaring fire in a friendly hearth. But there was no oil, and the lamp itself was useless, the mirrors smashed and scattered. There was nothing I could do but watch with my useless eyes and . . . I won't say pray, but something very like a prayer was burning in my heart.

"The tower was bending like a stalk of grass, but I had faith in her, Mr. Sharp. Sound as a rock she is. Besides, I wasn't about to give up my last command, not with so much depending on me. I felt that if I turned away for even a second, untold ships would founder. And you know very well that nothing can make me leave the bridge in a storm. But all at once, illuminated by a flash of lightning, I saw a body afloat in the surf. Pale white and gleaming like a fallen sliver of the moon, it was there for an instant, then gone, swallowed up in the storm, the night. At first I thought it was just these old eyes playing another one of their damned tricks, lending substance to a shadow, life to a drifting log. But then I saw it again, rolling in the trough between two waves, a body for sure but limp, lifeless, swept in close to shore by some chance but already being pulled back out to sea.

"Without pausing to think of those unseen ships depending on my vigilance, I ran from the observatory, nearly tumbling down the stairs in my haste. I burst out the door, into the thick of the storm. I knew at once that I hadn't a chance in hell of spotting the body again, much less

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retrieving it. The idea that it was still alive didn't even occur to me. Still, because it was a human being I had seen, for the sake of my own conscience I didn't want to give up so easily. I made my way down to the edge of the beach. Long tendrils of sea foam snaked about my ankles, seeking to draw me in, until I didn't dare take another step.

"Just then, in a flicker of lightning that shimmered like the Northern Lights, I saw her. Her shape rose from the frothy waters in one smooth motion, a wave swelling into flesh. Clothed only in foam, she hung limply on the crest, her white body seeming to dance as the wave skimmed her over the water with a catboat's grace. She collapsed at my feet, a puppet with cut strings. I knelt at her side, overcome by a feeling of awe as I took her in my trembling arms. Her eyelids fluttered. She gazed up at me, barely conscious. It was then that I recognized her."

By this time we had reached the lighthouse. The Captain paused in his narrative to usher me inside, then resumed after pulling the door shut behind him, pacing wildly back and forth as he spoke. I listened as before, understanding little of what he told me but spellbound by the passion in his voice. Every so often the lighthouse shifted with a groan the Captain ignored but which sent me edging closer to the door.

"I think I have told you once, Mr. Sharp, of Willis's eyes. How they contained all the moods of the seven seas, aye, and other seas besides. Every sea that ever existed or will exist, every sea dreamed of by man or fish. I had long ago forgotten her body, but her eyes . . . how could I forget them, with the sea itself continually before me? The body in my arms belonged to a stranger for all I knew or cared, but the moment I looked into her eyes I knew that, by some miracle, perhaps in answer to my prayer, Willis had come back to me. How didn't matter, or why, just the fact that she was there, in my arms again. I saw once more the oceans of my youth; though my ruined gaze could no longer plumb the depths it once had, I floated on the surface of Willis's eyes like a weary gull, content to rest there. I said her name, shouted it above the roar of the storm, but she recoiled from me as if repelled by my countenance. Had I changed so much that she no longer knew me? Well, even so, what did that matter now that she was mine again? I picked her up—she had fainted—and carried her into the lighthouse. Since then I haven't left her side for a moment, Mr. Sharp, until I saw you coming."

I looked around anxiously. "Where . . .?"

The Captain pointed to the ceiling. "Have no fear, Mr. Sharp, you shall see her!"

There was nothing I wanted more. It seemed obvious that the Captain had rescued some poor woman, then assigned her a familiar identity just as he had done with me. The difficult part, I foresaw, would be to get her away from him, to get them both out of the lighthouse, which trembled

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beneath my feet at the moment, underscoring the urgency of action. I decided to humor him. "Don't you think, sir, that after all she's been through, Willis might be better off in a hospital? I mean, for now?"

The Captain scuttled up to me as if I had disobeyed a direct order. I shrank back, afraid of him for the first time since that day three months earlier when he had addressed me from the fire, his back turned. "Are you saying I don't love her? That I can't protect what's mine? She won't leave me again, I swear it! I won't share her with anyone! Not with doctors, not even with you, Mr. Sharp!"

I spoke quickly, swallowing my fear, trying to salvage the situation. "I'm sorry, sir. I felt it was my duty as first mate to point out every option. Of course, I'll abide by your wishes."

That seemed to calm him down. He nodded stiffly. "Quite right, Mr. Sharp. Quite right. It's only . . . well, you understand. You'll be an old man too one day; before you know it! Take my advice: find yourself a girl like Willis and hold on tight, as if she were the only thing between you and drowning."

At that, he invited me to climb the stairs to the observatory and see Willis for myself. As he led me up, I ventured to mention once more my fears that the lighthouse would buckle once the brewing storm finally broke. The Captain merely slapped the railing and replied, "No need to worry, Mr. Sharp. She's solid as a rock. I'd stake my life on it."

"And Willis's?" I asked.

He stopped, peering down at me suspiciously. It was strange to see him from that twisted angle; I was used to looking down at him, and in the reversal of our usual positions I sensed that I had been fooling myself about the Captain's essential harmlessness.

"Mr. Sharp," he said in a clipped voice. "Your concern has already been noted. I forbid you to bring up the subject again. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir," I said sadly, as if the end of summer had come not with the start of school but only now, with the Captain's harsh words. Dimly, I realized that this game I had been playing for months of *Treasure Island* or *Robinson Crusoe* was no game, was in fact the realest thing I had ever done in my life. At that moment, I stopped thinking of myself as Mr. Sharp.

I don't remember what exactly I expected to find in the observatory; probably I envisaged a poor, bedraggled girl wrapped in blankets, wet and shivering with cold and fear, her eyes containing not oceans but simple tears. No doubt I pictured her hopeful look as I entered, my nod that would silently assure her that everything was going to be all right. If I had stopped playing one game, it was only to take up another; such is life for an eleven-year-old . . . and not just for an eleven-year-old.

The staircase spiraled up through the floor of the observatory. The

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first thing I saw as my head emerged was a naked woman gazing out through an open shutter at the storm-tossed sea; though her back was to us, her slumped shoulders and bowed head conveyed an impression of deep sadness and resignation. She wore her hair in a thick braid that coiled about her neck like a collar of dark leather; it flared into a hood around her head, accentuating her mournful aspect. A dull gray blanket lay about her ankles as if it had just slipped to the floor. I blushed, but could not look away; until then, my only knowledge of women's bodies had come from pictures passed hurriedly around the school bathroom or playground. Compared to those women, posed in positions that, though exciting, seemed somehow wrong, cold and manipulative and imbued with a cynicism that made me feel ashamed of my interest, Willis—for I had already begun to think of her by that name—was like a vision of purity, and my shame in viewing her came from another source entirely; I was ashamed not of myself, but for her, intruded upon in this way by the Captain and me.

The Captain motioned for me to come up, making no move to cover Willis. The room was lit by the oil lamp I had brought the Captain and a strange, mottled light, shot through with pale yellows and ugly greens, that drifted through the open window like a fog whenever lightning flashed. Drenched in this shadowy mixture of hues, she seemed unaware of—or uninterested in—our presence, gazing out the window as if yearning to throw herself back into the sea. Her wrists, I suddenly noticed, were bound by lengths of rope to the rusted iron railing set into the wall beneath the windows, giving her room enough to turn or sit but no more.

I turned angrily to the Captain, but before I could say a word he put a finger to his lips to shush me, then motioned toward Willis with his head, inviting me to approach her. A peaceful look had spread over his features. He seemed asleep, enjoying a pleasant dream. I realized he was seeing something quite different from what I was, that he was, in fact, gazing back into the past, clothing the naked woman before him in the vestments of a bygone age just as he called her by the name of a girl long dead.

Time moved slowly in that room, as if the Captain's dream were reaching out to snare me in its thick folds. The rumble of thunder seemed strangely protracted, stretching into a continuous snarl. I couldn't speak, could barely summon the strength to cross the floor and, picking up the blanket, drape it gently around Willis' smooth white shoulders.

She jumped at the touch of the blanket as if she hadn't heard my approach or, for that matter, suspected my presence behind her. In an instant she whirled to face me, the blanket clutched to her throat, the rope taut at her wrists, her cowl of dark hair flaring around her head like a cobra's hood. Yet I believe I was far more startled than she. For

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though her body was that of a woman, her face was like nothing I had ever seen or imagined, and I knew with an instinct as swift and sure as any in my life before or since that I was in the presence of something alien, unhuman.

Paralyzed by fear, I could only stare, struggling to make some sense out of what I was seeing, to explain it all away. Not that she was ugly or monstrous; no, my fear stemmed rather from the overwhelming strangeness of her beauty, which was like a gorgeous landscape too vast and exotic to be taken in by the eyes, by any of the senses alone or together, a kind of beauty comprehensible only in bits and pieces, and even then but imperfectly.

Her white skin was lustrous as an opal, yet I knew, without daring to stroke it, that it would feel soft as a dolphin's belly beneath my hand. The plane of her face was absolutely flat; I saw no eyes, no nose. only lips that were wide and thin, colored a deep blue and stretching . . . I would say from ear to ear, but she had no ears, at least none that I could see. Instead, where her ears should have been, long, fleshy strips ran down her slender neck to culminate just above her shoulders; dark red, almost purple in color, they fluttered like gills with each breath she took, flashing glimpses between their folds of a pink so bright and glistening that I thought at first I was gazing into a wound. I started to look away, unsettled by the sight, then froze, hypnotized by a glitter like sunlight skipping off water. Willis was opening her eyes.

The flesh above her mouth drew upward, revealing eyes as wide and round as portholes in a ship. For once, the captain had seen correctly. I felt as if I were gazing through those windows at an ocean that stretched on forever, without shore or horizon. And then, abruptly, I found myself on the other side of her eyes, in the water itself, buoyed up gently just as the Captain had described. Whatever lingering fear was in me vanished then. A sense of peace and well-being swelled my heart that is impossible to convey, like what a baby must experience while floating in the infinite sea of its mother's womb; I was surrounded not by water, but love. Above me, great birds circled lazily in the blue sky. One or two swept low, their wings grazing the water and sending up huge plumes of spray, as if hunting for fish. Yet I knew they posed no danger, that I was not in this strange world so much as it was in me.

Wonderful as it was to float there, I was not satisfied. I wanted to go deeper, to touch bottom if I could. The Captain's scabrous eyes kept him on the surface, but I had no such handicap. I was already jealous of Willis and did not want to share her with anyone. The thought that the Captain, in his own mind, was perhaps treading water beside me was unbearable; I would dive to depths he could not hope to reach.

My descent was effortless and seemed without end, a slow downward

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spiral past fish the likes of which I had never seen, some shaped so absurdly I had to laugh in a ticklish stream of bubbles, others instilling a terror no shark could hope to match, still others gazing at me through eyes that brimmed with sad intelligence, like cows grown wise. I never needed to draw a breath. Soon the water turned dark as night; fish drifted by like ghosts shedding a weak glow while far below I seemed to see thousands of shimmering lights, bright as a field of stars.

The feeling of love deepened in me, tinged with an urgency that I associated with thoughts of home and safety, of my mother waiting anxiously for my return and I as anxious to reach her. I realized dimly that Willis was attempting to communicate something to me that I was understanding only partly, if at all. But I knew one thing perfectly: if I could just reach those lights, everything would become clear.

Yet something was behind me, something large and terrifying. It was moving much faster than I. Soon it would overtake me. Panic welled up in me, Willis's on top of my own; I couldn't tell any longer whether she was in my body or I was in hers. Just then, without warning, it broke upon us like an undersea storm.

There was no time to react. Tumbled head over heels, we were pulled away from the lights, away from home. Everything was blackness. I (or, if you prefer, Willis—the distinction was meaningless at the time) felt as if I were being sucked into other oceans by the power of the storm, being drawn from one end of the seven seas to the other, across a distance so great I feared I would never be able to find my way back.

And then, in the midst of the darkness, I saw a single light. It shone bravely for an instant, cleaving the water to kindle a spark of hope in my breast, then winked out. But it was back again almost at once. I swam for it with all my strength, my heart beating to the rhythm of its bright pulse. But the storm was too fierce, the currents too strong; I was swept past the light. I saw it recede behind me, then all at once I burst into the air. A wave raised me high, then slammed me down. Gasping for breath, barely conscious, I felt myself lifted again. For a second, I thought I glimpsed the stark, defiant outline of the lighthouse against the angry sky. Then I was flung down.

I stood just where I had been standing minutes or was it hours earlier, as if the wave had tossed me right out of Willis's eyes. Tears were running down her face, and she was gazing at me with an imploring look that, despite her alien appearance, was as human as her tears. I was crying myself. Beside me, the Captain stared into Willis's eyes with a dazed, enraptured look, rocked on peaceful swells that only he could see. Baby noises came from his mouth. Then, her eyelids descending like windowshades, Willis turned smoothly away, facing into the gathering storm.

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The moment Willis's eyes closed, the Captain staggered back a step. He would have fallen had I not grasped his arm. He leaned against me for a second, then shook free, mumbling curses like a drunken man dragged out of a deep slumber. But an instant later he was his old self again, squinting up at me suspiciously through his clouded eyes as he wiped his mouth on the ragged sleeve of his jacket. "It's time you were going, Mr. Sharp," he said, ushering me down the stairs.

Descending, my mind was awhirl with the images Willis had placed there. The emotions I had shared with her were so strong that I felt them as mine, though tailored to fit my own situation: I had to get home, had to see my mother. Nothing else mattered, not even Willis, bound to the observatory railing like Rapunzel in the stories my mother had read to me in the fairy tale days when my father was still alive. I hurried ahead.

As I left the lighthouse, the Captain called to me from the foot of the stairs. "You won't tell a soul, will you, Mr. Sharp?"

"No, sir," I said, already running.

"She's our secret!" the Captain yelled behind me.

But even in the grips of this alien compulsion laid upon me like a magic spell, I knew that I could not share Willis with anyone, least of all the Captain. As I ran across the dunes under the lowering sky, passing once again the smashed carcass of the strange bird—a bird I now recognized from the vision Willis had given me—I was thinking of how I could steal her, hide her away from the Captain and everyone else, so that the oceans in her eyes would be mine alone to sail.

My mother and Mr. Hooper were still out when I arrived home. I paced the kitchen, unable to relax, eaten up by worry, by a longing so intense and desperate it seemed impossible to believe that the familiar sight of my mother could assuage it. Yet despite my preoccupation, a part of me realized that my suffering was merely a shadow of what Willis was undergoing in the observatory, looking out over the heaving ocean toward the home she had left behind, a home as close as the space between two heartbeats yet farther away than all the miles that ever were. I wondered if she had a family there. Perhaps she was married, with children of her own, children who missed their mother now as badly as I missed mine . . . as badly as I missed my father.

I ran outside as soon as I heard the car drive up, barely waiting for my mother to step out before throwing myself into her arms. She was taken aback, then hugged me close. I breathed in the smell of her, never wanting to let go. Yet the longing Willis had imparted to me did not lessen one bit; if anything, it grew, until I felt her sadness, her loneliness, more keenly than ever.

Finally my mother pushed me gently away. She was looking at me

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with tenderness, yet also with concern, and she reached out one hand to smooth my hair while the other touched my arm. I was acutely aware of Mr. Hooper, still in the car, watching with a bemused expression. It was all too much; I burst into tears.

"Why, whatever is the matter, Mark?" she asked, pressing me to her again.

I shook my head, unable to say a word. Even if I could have spoken, what would I have told her? And even if she had believed me, what could she have done? The Captain had been right to call Willis "our secret." She was that and more: she was my responsibility as well. And so, though I hated to admit it, was the Captain.

All that day the skies rumbled ominously, yet the storm expected every second did not break. That evening, at dinner, Mr. Hooper mentioned hearing rumors that we might be evacuated further inland as a precaution. I listened in horror, as if to a death sentence passed on Willis and the Captain. Later, lying in bed, I could not sleep. Beneath the sounds of thunder, I heard Willis calling to me in her silent way; strange images, invested with a nostalgic allure, danced in my mind like the notes of an irresistible song, and I pictured her facing away from the sea, her wide eyes open and shining inland, beaming her plea into the darkest reaches of my selfish heart.

Finally, I could resist no longer. I climbed out of bed, got dressed, and slipped through my bedroom window. I crept past my mother's window, in which a light still burned, then began to sprint across the dunes.

The air felt supercharged, crackling around me with the pent-up energies of the storm. Just as I came in sight of the lighthouse, a tremendous crash of thunder seemed to split the sky in two; a flash of lightning turned the world inside-out as hailstones the size of mothballs began to fall, their wicked sting goading me on.

When I burst into the lighthouse, the Captain was nowhere to be seen. The floor was pitching like the deck of a ship at sea. Held in place by a pool of hardened wax, a single candle guttered upon the Captain's table, bathing the room in a murky, undersea glow. Hailstones thudded against the closed shutters with a deafening clatter. A sudden crash sounded above my head. Stumbling to the stairs, I climbed as quickly as I could.

Entering the observatory, I was just in time to see, in the soft orange glow of the oil lamp, the Captain pick himself up and launch himself at Willis with a hoarse bellow. She lashed out with her fist, catching him on the side of the head. He dropped back a step, weaving like a boxer, then fell heavily to the floor. He lay there unmoving, but Willis did not seem to notice. Instead, she began tearing with her teeth at the ropes that bound her wrists. I hung back for a second, afraid the Captain would rise. When he did not, I went to his side, knelt down, and quickly slipped

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his fishing knife from his belt, where he always wore it. His lip was bloodied, and his left eye was swollen almost completely shut; he had taken some good shots.

When I stood, Willis was facing me, her hands held out, wrists up, in a gesture of supplication. I hesitated, not wanting to lose her. She shook her arms impatiently, and I stepped forward, raising the knife to cut her free.

It was then that I made the mistake of looking into Willis's eyes. They did not suck me in as they had before; instead, she seemed to be regarding me from far away, from a distance I had crossed once but could not hope to cross again. A part of me was with her there, and I knew that I would never get it back no matter how long and hard I searched for it or how patiently I awaited its return. I saw, too, reflected in her eyes like the future in a crystal ball, the journey she was determined to take, putting herself once more at the mercy of the storm, hoping that it would carry her back across the seven seas but knowing just the same how slender her chances were. I did not want this knowledge, but it could not be refused. There was nothing I could say to make her stay, nothing I could do but help her go. In an instant, I had cut her loose.

Ignoring me, Willis leaped to the window ledge and, kicking the shutter open, dove. The hail had turned to a heavy rain, and as I peered out a flash of lightning gave me a glimpse of her in the surf that had already undermined the weak foundations of the lighthouse, a flicker of white in the dark and furious sea gone at once and forever. As I watched her vanish, an emptiness yawned inside me deep enough to swallow oceans, and for a moment I was tempted to follow her, dragged behind by an invisible thread.

And perhaps I would have leaped, following not just Willis but my father as well, had the Captain not grabbed me from behind. He yanked me away from the window, spun me around and threw me to the floor, plucking the knife from my hand. His wounded face contorted into a mask of rage, the Captain began to scream as he advanced upon me, brandishing the knife in sweeping arcs: "Mutiny, Mr. Sharp! Mutiny, you damned traitor! How dare you steal my Willis? I'll see you dead, do you hear? I'll cut you up myself and throw you to the sharks—"

The Captain was interrupted in his tirade as the whole lighthouse abruptly sagged in a sickening lurch that sent him sprawling, arms spinning in an effort to save his balance. I stayed on the ground, crawling desperately for the stairs. "Come on, Captain! She's going over!"

He had fetched up against one wall. "That's a lie! She's solid as a rock and you know it!"

There was no reasoning with him. Following my example, the Captain dropped to his knees and began to crawl after me, pulling himself along

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the sloping floor by digging in with the point of his knife. "You'll not escape me, traitor!" he called. "I'll see you dead!"

The tower gave another lurch. Unable to grab hold of anything, I slid back toward the Captain, who, thanks to his knife embedded in the floor, had not lost any ground at all. I managed to stop just inches ahead of him.

"Now I've got you!" he cackled jubilantly, dragging himself slowly forward.

I scampered away, barely keeping clear. One more lurch would send me sliding into his grasp. The stairs seemed miles away. My strength was exhausted. And then I heard my name shouted from below. "Here I am," I yelled back. "Up here! Help!"

It was Mr. Hooper. My mother had sent him after me upon discovering my empty bed, sure that I had gone to the lighthouse. His wrinkleld face popped into view not a moment too soon; the Captain was almost upon me. Quick as a wink, Mr. Hooper pulled me out of danger. "Who are you?" he demanded of the Captain. "Don't you know this whole place is about to fall?"

"So it's you, Roberts," the Captain cried, quick as ever to recognize a perfect stranger. "I'll get you yet!" He raised the knife to hurl at us, but in doing so lost his balance, tumbling back against the far wall. The knife flew from his hand in a loopy arc, smashing into the oil lamp. In a second, there was a sea of fire between us.

The lighthouse shuddered again. Mr. Hooper started down the spiral staircase, which had already been twisted out of shape. I fought in his grasp: "No, we can't leave the Captain!"

"We'll be lucky to save ourselves," Mr. Hooper replied, tightening his grip.

"You don't understand . . ."

I slumped against him, exhausted. He carried me out of the lighthouse, into the stinging rain, then set me on my feet. He still held me by the hand though, afraid I might try to dash back inside. But I had no stomach for that. The observatory was blazing like a torch, tongues of flame shooting out the windows to lick the sky. I watched the door anxiously for the Captain. Then Mr. Hooper said, as if to himself, "He's not coming out."

I knew he was right. I felt numb, drained. In a way it seemed fitting that the Captain perish with his last command. Yet I grieved for him just the same, despite his attempts to kill me. Like Willis, he would take a part of me with him.

Together under stormy skies, Mr. Hooper and I watched the burning lighthouse tremble, tilt, then topple in a slow arc. It hit the water with a roar, sending up a tower of spray and steam and sparks that faded

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gradually into the rainy night. Soon there was nothing to mark where the lighthouse had stood but an empty space, and even that, I knew, would be gone by morning. We turned around, still holding hands, and began the long walk home. Neither one of us said a word.

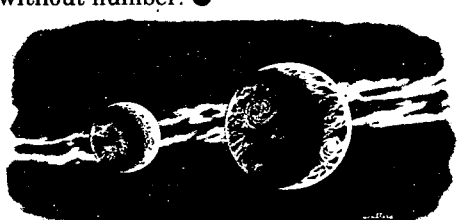
I'm an old man myself now, older than the Captain. I think of him often, and of his advice to me. Find a girl like Willis and hold on tight, he said. I spent my whole life searching and ended up here, on another beach, beside another ocean, as alone as when I started. That empty space where the lighthouse stood; it's been in my heart ever since.

The Captain's body was never recovered, and though I told my story a thousand times, described him over and over again, he was never identified. Sometimes I think that he came from a place like Willis's home, only not so far away, not so different. For years, after every storm, I returned to Cape Henlopen, but nothing strange ever washed ashore. When the lighthouse fell, a gate clanged shut.

My mother and Mr. Hooper were married as planned. Though there were problems at first, gradually he wove himself into our lives, and ours into his, with a grace as surprising to behold as his clumsy fingers at work on an intricate knot. When Mr. Hooper . . . Walter . . . died twenty-one years later at the age of sixty-three, not even his death could unravel that knot. My mother never remarried, and while I still lived in that part of the country, I visited his grave twice a year—twice more than I visited the empty resting place of my other father, who, as the years went by, I came to remember less and less.

Each evening now I pause in my writing to watch the sun set over the Pacific. Bisected by the horizon, the sun glows like an orange ember, sending a russet beam across the water as if from a great lighthouse in the west. Sometimes I linger until the night opens up before me, clear and infinite as a saint's eye, rich in stars, and I think about the field of lights Willis was trying so hard to reach and wonder if she made it home. And then I think perhaps there are other gates that lead across the seven seas, gates that are not blown wide by the gusting winds of storms but that swing open gently with a man's last breath. If that is so, if a light shines out in the dark time of my death, when hope and despair alike have been washed overboard, I will follow it over seven thousand seas.

Over seas without number. ●



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For Chesley Bonestell 1898–1987

The Sun's heat falls
impartially
on many families of weather:

planets furious and serene
climates cold or blistering

molten metal flows
down glowing cinder mountains
manic orbit spin

frozen hydrogen
only feels the stars' cold light
rotate glacially

From Mercury to Pluto
(except for us)
a dead and deadly spectrum from fire to ice
a silent march of worlds denied
the sinister blessing of life—

or is it otherwise?

Perhaps upon some hydrocarbon shore
waves of methane lap invitingly
and some bather, unimaginable,
sheds his integument
and raises—how many of?—his eyes
and sees the dim blue spark of Earth
beside the golden splinter of the Sun—
and feels for us with several of his hearts
and pities us our toxic steamy clime—
shakes his heads and slides beneath the waves
for his daily life-restoring draught
of poison.

—Joe Haldeman

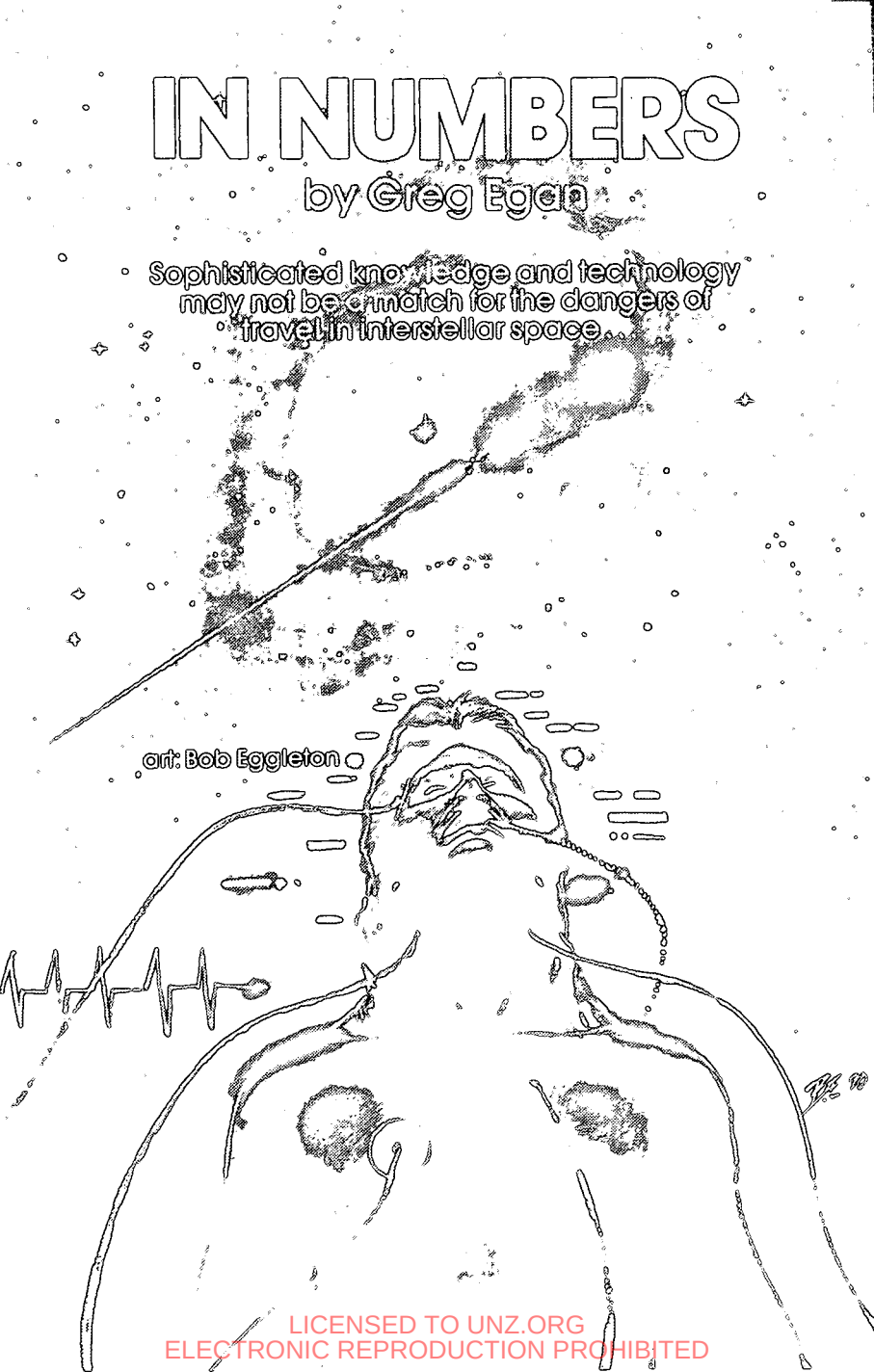
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IN NUMBERS

by Greg Egan

Sophisticated knowledge and technology may not be a match for the dangers of travel in interstellar space...

art: Bob Eggleton



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I dream that I'm floating in the void between the stars. Untethered. No ship in sight. Suitless, naked to the vacuum. I search frantically for the sun, as if merely knowing its direction could save me, but I'm spinning much too fast to find my bearings, and each time I catch a glimpse of what might be the home star, I lose sight of it again before I can be sure.

"Last night"—as day nineteen came to a close, with Callaghan's condition unchanged—the orders arrived from Earth, officially canceling the mission.

We shut down the drive for six hours while we rotated *Cyclops* one hundred and eighty degrees. Now we are decelerating at 1.3 gees—as fast as we can, within safety parameters—but we'll still be traveling away from the solar system for fourteen and a half more days before we even come to a halt, and then it will take as long again just to get back to the point where deceleration began. I have no right to be even mildly surprised by this—to shed the velocity gained over nineteen days' ship time at 1 gee requires 14.6 days at 1.3; any intelligent child could do the calculation—but some Earth-bound, commonsensical part of my mind still can't quite accept a twenty-nine-day U-turn.

Callaghan is facing away from the door as I enter the infirmary, but a glance at his EEG tells me he's awake. I call out in what I hope is a calm, reassuring voice, "Andrew? It's only me. How are you feeling today?" The words are picked up by the microphone in the helmet of my quarantine suit, pumped out by the external speaker, bounced off the gleaming, tiled walls, then fed back to me through my headset—creating the unsettling illusion that my skull is several meters wide, and hollow.

He turns at the sound, emits a series of angry grunts, and makes a show of trying to break free of his restraints, but after a short while he goes limp, and just glares at me resentfully.

I stand by the foot of the bed, suddenly feeling drained, lethargic, hopeless. Or maybe just *heavy*; the extra weight is going to take a while to get used to. Twenty-four more kilograms, distributed uniformly, isn't exactly crippling, but even the slightest movement now requires a conscious effort.

"How are you?"

I'm convinced by now that he can't understand a word I say, but I'd still rather make a fool of myself than deal with a living, conscious patient in silence. There's no evidence that the sound of my voice is even any comfort to him, but I'm damned if I'm going to treat him like a cadaver.

"Is the gravity getting you down?"

Three days ago, Andrew Callaghan would have winced at the lame pun, and then lectured me on my sloppy terminology: "Kindly remember,

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'Doctor' Dreyfus—and I use the title loosely—that the Principle of Equivalence does *not* grant ye license to refer to the inertial force ye are experiencing as 'gravity.' " In that glorious, over-the-top Scottish accent that he put on when he was being jokingly pompous, in place of his usual pan-European amalgam. His father was Irish, his mother Scottish, but he grew up in Switzerland; three days ago, he spoke five languages. Now, my words mean no more to him than his grunts mean to me.

I close my eyes and fight down a wave of panic. Earth is still forty-six days away. In forty-six days, *this* could happen to all of us. I want to lean over and shake him, force him to confess that he's acting, that it's all a monstrous practical joke. I actually believed that, for the first few hours (in retrospect, a feat of wishful thinking verging on the psychotic—*nobody* indulges in practical jokes on board an experimental spacecraft). I thought everyone was in on it: make the doctor shit himself, and then laugh about it for the rest of the flight. I would have happily laughed along with them. But when I searched their faces for ill-concealed conspiratorial glee, all I found was the same sickening realization: *This could happen to all of us. This could happen to me.*

No diagnostic instrument can find the least thing wrong with Callaghan, and the hundreds of experts back on Earth who've seen the data can agree on only one thing: so far, there is no direct evidence of any toxin, any infection, any lesion, or any neurochemical deficit or excess. His brain activity has certainly changed, diminishing in specific regions in a manner entirely consistent with his diminished behavioral repertoire, but there is no sign of neurological damage to *explain* this loss of function.

This proves nothing; there are conditions that cannot be diagnosed until autopsy, even on Earth. And since Callaghan's medical history—personal and ancestral, physical and mental—is, or was, spotless, if some trace neurotoxin has contaminated the food, or some mutant virus is drifting through the ship's air, there is no reason to believe that he was uniquely vulnerable. It must be assumed that we are all at risk.

For all the high-powered technology at my disposal, I'd give anything for a simple, verbal report from the patient himself. He's a long way from being comatose; there must be *something* going through his mind. Although that begs the question: going through *whose* mind? Does Andrew Callaghan still exist? At what level of impairment does he lose his identity? And who lies in this bed, then? An unnamed stranger, without a past or a future? The naïve vocabulary of personality fails; the painful fact is that the human brain is capable of states that can't be categorized in such cozy terminology. Sometimes I think the only way to stay sane—when confronted with malfunctions of consciousness that betray, so starkly, its physical nature—is by adopting a variation on solipsism:

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other people may be nothing but biochemical robots, run by slabs of interconnected neurons . . . but me, I'm not like that at all; I'm *real*.

Via the control plate fixed to his depilated skull, I anesthetize and selectively paralyze him, then I wheel him into the scanning room. I'm still hoping that evidence of a virus is going to turn up; if not the nucleic acid itself, maybe some tell-tale foreign protein. However limited the practical usefulness of such a discovery, it would be a great psychological victory to finally *know* what it is we're fighting.

I lock the bed into place inside the NMR cavity, hit a few keys, and the computer takes over. The scan will last nearly an hour, there's nothing to do but sit and wait.

Perhaps the hypothetical virus is causing the production of an altered form of one of the neurotransmitters, too close to the real thing for this crude heap of coils to tell the difference, but sufficiently deformed to be unable to bind properly to its receptor? It's possible, I suppose—as possible as any of my other wild guesses. No doubt the experts back home have already thought of it and dismissed it. The world's best neuroscientists are all busily debating the Callaghan case, and when they manage to agree upon a hypothesis, I'm sure we'll be told without delay (apart from the unavoidable one: twelve hours now, and growing longer). My expertise is in *space medicine*; my specialties are radiation sickness, and—amusingly enough—the effects of insufficient gravity. Why should I expect to come up with the answer myself? Just because I'm here in the flesh? *Just because my own life may depend on it?*

There's a buzzing in my headset. I hit a button on my belt to accept the call.

"David?"

"Yeah?"

"It's Jenny. I'm in the maser room. Can you come and take a look at Greta, please."

"Why? What is it?"

She hesitates long enough to make a reply unnecessary.

This is it. It's spreading.

I flick off my communicator. For a moment I simply feel numb, but then the ludicrous nature of the situation fills me with a bitter rage. Eight immaculately healthy people, on a milk run of a test flight to an arbitrary point in interstellar space; what are the odds of finding yourself in the middle of a fucking *epidemic?*

I'm on the verge of letting go and screaming out a string of angry obscenities, but I catch myself. What did I honestly expect? That quarantining Callaghan *after he showed symptoms* would be enough to contain the disease? I can't fall to pieces every time a miracle fails to take place.

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I switch the communicator back on; the channel is still open. "I'm on my way."

"You're going to feel nauseous, but that should be the only side-effect; if you experience any other problems, let me know at once."

They all nod earnestly. Thomas asks, "How nauseous is nauseous? Throwing up?"

"I hope not. The digestive tract isn't physically affected, although you may feel like it is."

He grins. "Well, that's okay, then."

DDC-XV, a mixture of anti-viral agents, is no guarantee of anything; it's capable of disabling perhaps 40 per cent of known viruses, and slowing down another 10 percent. Since whatever is on board can only be a mutant of something we brought from Earth, the odds are really no different: one chance in two of any useful effect at all.

It's a strange sight: the crew lined up in front of me like nervous children trying to look brave while waiting to be inoculated. Although I've read all their files, although I know all their medical idiosyncrasies backward, they've never really been my *patients* before. Until now, they've just been colleagues and friends, and the sudden shift in the relationship is disconcerting. I hate the way they're looking at me; as if *I* had some kind of power. As if it were *me*, and not the virus, they had to fear, or respect, or appease.

Captain Salih al-Qasbi is first to receive the jab. It's almost funny; since the team was assembled back on the moon, queues have always formed in the precise order of ascension to command: Lidia Garcia, navigator. Kayathiri Sangaralingam, drive specialist. Thomas Bwalya, life-support engineer. Jenny Riley, cyberneticist. (Greta Nordstrom, communications engineer. Andrew Callaghan, astronomer.) Then me, last and least, insurance against some unlikely emergency—like the escape pods, and about as much use.

"What else can we do?" asks Kay. "Shouldn't we be wearing quarantine suits?"

"It wouldn't be worth the discomfort. We've been breathing the same air as each other for nineteen days; we must all have the virus in our bodies by now." The notion of anyone engaging in physical intimacy on board *Cyclops* is ludicrous; there are video cameras in every corner of the ship, recording everything we do, twenty-four hours of every simulated day. For the virus to have passed from Callaghan to Nordstrom, it must be able to survive in air, so the chances are that we've all been infected.

Jenny frowns. "You keep talking about 'the virus.' What if it isn't a virus? What if it's something else?"

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"What else can it be? A contaminant in the food doesn't make sense any more—a toxin doesn't just appear by magic, there'd have to be a fungus or bacterium making it, and Thomas and I have both done dozens of tests, and turned up nothing."

Salih says, "But no tests for a virus are positive, either. All we have are negative results."

"Viruses are more elusive. It's a process of elimination; if it was anything else, we would have pinned it down by now." I decline to add that electron microscopy on brain tissue from a dead patient might settle the issue once and for all.

"But are you sure there is no other possibility, David?"

"If there is, I can't imagine what." I look around, a little resentful, but trying not to let it show. "Can anyone?"

There's a long silence, then Lidia says, "This might sound far-fetched, and I *know* the symptoms are nothing like any recognized form of radiation sickness, but . . ."

I shake my head vehemently. "Not only do the symptoms make no sense, but the monitors all show that we're getting no more of any kind of radiation than we'd be receiving on Earth. The shielding is working perfectly, against spillage from the drive, against cosmic rays . . . *nothing* is getting through."

"What about something we can't measure? Something that would pass right through the shields? Neutrinos, or some other weakly interacting particle? No humans have been out this far before, only robot probes, and none with detectors that could pick up neutrinos."

"Neutrinos are harmless. We'd be hit with more neutrinos back on Earth, from the sun, than we would be out here. And if it's some other kind of radiation, where's it coming from? What's kept it out of the solar system? What's kept it off the Earth's surface—our shielding is just as effective as an entire planetary atmosphere. And if it scarcely interacts with matter, how can it possibly cause brain damage?"

She nods agreement, but looks away with an air of frustration, as if I'd somehow missed the point. I'm puzzled; she's ten times the physicist I am, she should have thought of every objection I raised before she even spoke.

Jenny says, "What about the air filters. Wasn't there a Mars flight in the '50's—"

Thomas is indignant. "The *air filters* are clean!"

"The air filters *are* clean," I agree, "and in any case, I wouldn't be able to miss a bacterial infection."

Thomas says, "That Mars flight was a passenger liner with some guy on board who'd caught Legionnella Six *back on Earth*. The ship's life-

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support system had nothing to do with it. Why don't you get your facts straight before you open your mouth?"

The discussion takes us nowhere, and Salih soon breaks it up and sends us back to our posts.

I check my patients via the infirmary's video cameras. The robot orderly is trying to feed Nordstrom, and with infinite dumb patience it offers her spoonful after spoonful of mush that she spits back onto its ceramic arm. Callaghan was the same at first, and I thought I'd have to put him on a drip, but after less than a day he gave in.

I review the recent data stream from Earth, but there's been no progress. The French and Australian delegates to the latest teleconference on the "Cyclops Syndrome" both claim to have brilliant new theories—but are refusing to divulge them until the question of patent rights on any potential spin-offs has been settled. I know enough technodiplomacy-speak to realize that they have no "theories"; it's their convoluted way of restating their protest at having had no citizens included in the crew. I slump against the desk, wondering: When the ship full of corpses is recovered, will each government jealously claim the body of their own nation's crew member? Will they race each other to the dissecting tables for the honor of being first to announce the cause of death?

This first manned test of the *Cyclops* design—to an unspectacular patch of vacuum a mere five light-days from Earth—was trumpeted as *the* miracle of international cooperation, in an era of increasing tension on every other front. The truth is, it's been abused all along, treated as the conduit for a thousand petty diplomatic paybacks. Well, better that than war—although now, with the mission a failure, what kind of safety valve will it be? The newest weapons—nanomachines, molecular "robots" the size of a virus—carry no risk of fall-out or nuclear winter, and have a respect for property that puts the neutron bomb to shame. Already, governments around the world are painting their enemies as "less than human." I stare at the newscasts in disbelief, and think: *After all those decades it took to get rid of the fucking bomb, it's happening again. Genocide is becoming thinkable again.*

There's a knock on the door. It's Lidia.

"David? Can I talk to you?"

"Sure."

She sits, with an involuntary sigh of bliss at the pleasure of taking the weight off her feet.

"What I said back there . . . ," she waves her hands dismissively, ". . .you're right, of course; radiation makes no sense—but that wasn't really what I was getting at."

"Then what—?"

"The *point* is, nobody has ever been this far out before." I can't help

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a puzzled scowl, and she quickly adds, "What difference should that make? *I don't know.* Of course I don't know! Twenty thousand people spent *fifteen years* planning this mission—I don't expect to be able to outguess them in a couple of hours. Some exotic form of radiation was the only tangible thing I could think of, off the top of my head, but the real point is that we just don't know what's out here."

I'm about to make a sarcastic remark about ethereal alien lifeforms, slipping through the hull and feeding on our brains, but I stop myself in time. If Lidia is becoming mildly paranoid, the worst thing I can do is mock her. I say, reasonably, "We know as much about what's out here as people ever knew about *interplanetary* space. *More.* Probes have been leaving the solar system for a hundred and fifty years. The interstellar medium has been sampled all the way to Alpha Centauri. There are no surprises, there's nothing strange out here. And even if there were . . . what astrophysical phenomenon could possibly explain what's happened to Callaghan and Nordstrom?"

"I've told you, I don't know. All I'm suggesting is that you keep an open mind." She hesitates, frowning, clearly embarrassed by the vagueness of her argument, but nevertheless unwilling to abandon it. "Humans spent millions of years evolving on the Earth's surface, adapting to a very specific set of environments. We *think* we're aware of all the restrictions that places on us, but we can't be sure. I mean, suppose they'd sent people into orbit before they'd discovered the Van Allen radiation belts. Or suppose they'd sent a free-fall expedition to Saturn, before any research had been done on the effects of long-term weightlessness." I start to protest, but she cuts me off. "I know, that sounds ludicrous, but only because both those problems were obvious in advance. That doesn't mean it always has to be that way. Isn't it possible that we've come across something that couldn't be anticipated, something utterly *new?*"

I say, begrudgingly, "I know what you're getting at. People have been acting for a hundred years like they knew all the problems of interstellar flight, and that once we came up with the technical solutions, those flights would be almost . . . trivial. The usual hubris. You're saying, perhaps there's something qualitatively different about interstellar space, something that all the unmanned probes couldn't detect, something that a century of planetary exploration couldn't prepare us for. Okay, it's an interesting theoretical point, but where does it actually get us? Even if you're right, all it means is that we have *no idea at all* how to protect ourselves. Intellectual humility may be a virtue, but frankly, I'd rather be optimistic and keep on believing that it has to be a virus."

She looks away, again with that air of frustration, and I suddenly feel ashamed of my sensible, insipid response. "You should speak to Kay, not me. She's the particle physicist, the genius, the great theoretician. I'm

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just a second-rate doctor who failed Lateral Thinking 100. I can't have radical scientific ideas; I'd be struck off the list for unprofessional conduct."

Lidia smiles ruefully. "I talked to Kay half an hour ago. She said I was full of crap." She shrugs. "She's probably right. And I hope that it *is* a virus, as much as you do. Keep looking for it, David. Forget everything I've said. You have work to do, I shouldn't have distracted you."

The robot orderly feeds and cleans my robustly healthy idiot patients, the computerized scanner probes their bodies with magnetic fields and microwave pulses for the signature of a molecule that has no right to be there—and fails. I send all the data back to Earth—NMR spectra, PET scans, EEGs, video recordings—along with my own observations and speculations, for what they're worth. In return, Earth spews back a torrent of case studies from the literature; all make fascinating reading, but none come close to matching the pattern of symptoms—and lack of symptoms—of the Cyclops Syndrome.

Then come the signs that Earth is getting worried: an interminable series of messages from heads-of-state, each one full of the same emetic platitudes about their deep concern for our safety, their people's good wishes, and our own inspirational courage. Each one setting up the right credentials, carving out a share of the PR catharsis, just in case we don't make it back alive.

Worse are the broadcasts from our families—scripted just as tightly, but delivered with less skill. I sit in my cabin and listen to my parents being forced to declare their love for me in the vocabulary of prime time human interest. After a few seconds, I turn down the sound, but the travesty is still too painful to watch. I close my eyes and press my fingers to the glass, shaking with anger.

I check everyone for symptoms of neurological deterioration. I analyze their visual tracking patterns, measure their reaction times, test their language and cognitive skills. Nobody's results betray the slightest signs of impairment—but then, except for those tests that require the subject's understanding or cooperation, the same can be said of Callaghan and Nordstrom.

For a few paranoid hours, I wonder if some spiteful government has infected us with a tailored virus, or perhaps even killer nanomachines. It's not unlikely, *per se*, but the details make no sense; surely a saboteur would have chosen to mimic a known disease, rather than risk arousing suspicion with a novel set of symptoms.

Unless, of course, the whole point was to arouse suspicion, to inflame tensions, to start the hunt for someone to blame. But that doesn't bear thinking about.

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Salih asks me to ask each member of the crew to help in some way, for the sake of morale. Jenny writes new software for the protein synthesizer, in preparation for churning out artificial antibodies, should we actually find something to make antibodies *against*. Lidia and Kay check and recheck, calibrate and recalibrate, all the imaging and analytical equipment. I've already been showing Thomas every report and chart cranked out by the computer, in the hope that he'll identify some subtle clue that I've overlooked. Salih himself insists on feeding both Callaghan and Nordstrom for one meal a day, expressing the hope that this human contact might make a difference to their condition—a gesture which I find touching, but also irritating, because it seems like an implied criticism of the way I'm looking after them. Or perhaps I'm just hypersensitive.

Days pass without another victim, and I begin to feel less pessimistic. Dramatic as the behavioral changes Callaghan and Nordstrom have suffered might be, the lack of detectable physical damage implies that the virus is capable of infecting only a very specific class of neurons—and perhaps even that is contingent upon some genetic quirk that no other crew member happens to share.

Earth is still weeks away, though; the maser lag is *still* growing longer, and I can't suppress a sense of frustration—at times, verging on panic—at the slowness of our return. It's not as if our homecoming held out the promise of a guaranteed, instant cure; perhaps it's more a wish to be rid of the burden of responsibility than fear of the virus itself.

And every night, I dream the same dream: that I'm spinning, alone, in the void, trying in vain to find the way home.

I'm shaken roughly from sleep, and it takes me several seconds to recall where I am. Squinting against the ceiling panels switched to daylight strength, I make out Thomas leaning over me.

"Oh shit, shit, *shit*."

He laughs drily. "Well, you're all right then."

I stagger out of bed. "Who is it this time?"

"Salih. Kay. Jenny."

"Oh, no." I hesitate in the doorway. I want to fall apart, I want to climb back under the blankets and hide, *I want to be home*, but Thomas just stands there, puzzled, impatient, and I realize that I lack the courage to betray my weakness to him. I think, that's all that's kept me going: propping up my fears, one against the other.

Salih is sitting on the floor in a corner of the dining room. He eyes me warily as I approach, but looks more lost and confused than aggressive. I want to say something to him before I fire the tranquilizer dart—I feel

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I owe him some kind of apology or explanation—but then I smother the absurd impulse and just do it.

Jenny is in her cabin, hitting fistfuls of keys on her terminal, like an infant or a monkey pretending to type, peering at the screen with intense concentration. When she hears me, she turns and bellows angrily, then picks up a memory cartridge and throws it straight at my head. I duck. She scrambles under the bed. I lie on my stomach awkwardly, muscles still stiff from sleep. She screams at me. I fire.

Kay is in bed, shivering and sobbing. Lidia sits beside her, murmuring comforting nonsense.

"Kay?" I crouch near the foot of the bed. She ignores me. Lidia says dully, "I can't get her to speak. I've tried, David, but I can't." As if the whole phenomenon might simply be a failure on our part to trick or bully the victims back to normality.

After we've moved the three new patients to the infirmary, and Lidia has broadcast a terse report to Earth, we sit in the dining room, drinking coffee, making plans for our own presumably inevitable decline.

Lidia says, "The drive and navigation software will just keep on running. There are stages when human confirmation is requested, but if no input is received within five minutes, the computer goes ahead as per the flight plan. Once we're close enough for remote reprogramming, ISUSAT will take over for the boarding rendezvous. Short of something drastic and highly improbable, like a meteor through the fuel rings, we'll make it back."

Thomas says, "Ditto for life-support. After all the hours I've spent monitoring and fine-tuning, unless there's a massive equipment failure—and there's no reason there should be—the whole system can take care of itself."

It's easier than I thought it would be, to mimic their calm, pragmatic tones. "The orderly should be able to cope with feeding all eight of us, so long as we're properly restrained. The beds have an ultrasonic system to maintain peripheral circulation; we can expect a certain amount of muscle wastage, that's inevitable, but no pressure sores, no gaping ulcers. The fecal and urinary disposal system has its own lubricant and disinfectant supplies; of course, nobody's ever been on one for weeks without human supervision, but so long as we're unable to get our hands free to break the seals, I can't see any problems."

Lidia says, "Well, then."

The newest patients are all still under the influence of the tranquilizer, and Callaghan and Nordstrom are mercifully asleep. I strap down Thomas and Lidia, then undress and slide into the surreal plastic contraption that will carry away my wastes. I've used something similar

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before, in a space suit when I was in training; it's not pleasant, but it's not that bad.

The orderly isn't programmed to manipulate the restraints, but with a long, tedious series of explicit voice commands, I manage to instruct it to strap me down.

For several minutes, we lie in silence, then Thomas clears his throat and says, "They'll find a cure. It might take a month, or a year, but they won't give up on us."

Sure. If we live for a month, or a year. If we live long enough even to reach Earth.

I keep my mouth shut.

Lidia says, "What do you think it will be like?"

Thomas says, "I don't know. Maybe like a dream. Maybe like being a helpless child again, a baby. Maybe like nothing at all."

They talk for a while, and I listen in silence, a professional observer of The Patient's response to a stressful prognosis, and I feel a warm glow of satisfaction at the admirable way that they're handling their fears—but I can't join in.

A few hours later, Thomas succumbs. He screams with rage at finding himself bound, waking Callaghan and Nordstrom, who scream along with him.

I say, "I can't stand this. I'm getting up."

Lidia yells over the cacophony, "Don't be stupid! What do you think, you're immune? If you're roaming around the ship when it happens to you, you're going to hurt yourself, or damage something—"

I start telling the orderly how to release me. Lidia shouts her own instructions, and the thing swings back and forth wildly. I give up, suddenly realizing that the robot is incapable of righting itself; if it falls over, we're all dead.

Eventually, the three of them shut up, presumably falling asleep; in the dim light, it's hard to be certain.

Lidia says softly, "You've never told us, David. Who's waiting for you, back on Earth?"

I laugh. "No one."

"Come on."

"It's the truth." I feel myself redden. It's none of her business; why should I have to explain myself to her? "I just, I don't have time. I prefer to be independent."

"Everybody needs someone."

"That sounds like a line from a bad song. And it happens not to be true. The truth is, I don't much like people." I wish I could drag my words back from out of the darkness. Then I think: what does it matter, now?

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There's an awkward silence, then she says, "So, what inspired you to become a doctor?"

I laugh, with genuine mirth, because I've only just remembered. "Reading Camus' *The Plague*."

There's no reply.

Morning is a nightmare. The ceiling panels slowly brighten, and everyone wakes, screaming protests at the presence of so many strangers. I'm tempted again to have the orderly release me, but I fight down the impulse. Instead, I instruct it to administer sedation. Callaghan and Nordstrom are fitted with control plates, but the others have to be injected. As silence descends, my relief turns sour; I feel more lonely and frightened than ever.

I have the orderly move the infirmary's terminal next to my bed, and with voice control I switch through the signal from Earth. They send to us constantly, they can always think of something to say. Weather reports for our home towns, snippets of news (but nothing too depressing), herds of primary school children around the world, praying to their various gods for our safe return. A response to Lidia's final report isn't due until tomorrow morning; I'm staring back into a cheerful past, when there were only two victims, and it looked like we had some hope.

Around noon, I make a broadcast of my own. "This is Dreyfus," I say, redundantly. "Bwalya developed symptoms at 0200 hours, Garcia at 0300 hours." I'm guessing the times, I have no real idea. And who the fuck cares? I switch off the camera. Trembling, I vomit onto the bed and the floor. The orderly cleans it up.

I grow calm again as the hours pass, and a little more rational. I don't think about death—I can't see any point in doing so—but I can't help wondering how it will feel, finally to be like Callaghan and the others. Less than human? That might not be so bad. Feeling less, thinking less, might not be so bad at all.

Night comes. Staring up at the faintly glowing ceiling, I wonder if I'll even notice when it happens to me. I consider talking aloud, describing my state of mind for the sake of whoever gets their hands on the infirmary's log, but introspection yields nothing worth reporting.

I say, "Introspection yields nothing worth reporting."

A few seconds later—suddenly unsure if I actually spoke, or merely formed the intention—I repeat myself.

Shortly afterward, I suffer the same uncertainty again.

Disembodied pain washes in and out of my shallow sleep for a long time. It's only when I start to attach it to specific parts of me—this ache is from my shoulders, that cramp is from my right calf—that I begin to wake.

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When a throbbing that was an abstract notion alights deep inside my skull, I try to retreat back into sleep, but the pain is too great. I open my eyes and try to move, and then I remember.

A tunnel of pain and fear, stretching back for what seems like eternity. The width of the tunnel is the width of my shoulders, the width of the harness that holds me to the bed, but its depth is striated with light and darkness, with noise and confusion, with loneliness and the coldest misery. A dream of suffocation, infinitely prolonged.

It takes me forever, ten minutes at least, to instruct the orderly to release me. I'm too weak to leave the bed, but I can move my arms, I can roll onto my stomach, I can start trying to rid myself of the nightmare burnt into my flesh.

When I finally succeed in raising my head, I find the rest of the crew still strapped to their beds. Most have their eyes open, but are staring listlessly at the ceiling or the walls.

I squint at my watch for the date, and then struggle with memory and arithmetic. *Eighteen days.* I feel a surge of elation. I may not have conquered the virus—perhaps this is nothing but a temporary remission—but every extension of the time scale on which the disease is operating brings us closer to home, and the chance of a cure.

I switch on the broadcast from Earth. They're playing a loop at us that says little more than: "*Cyclops*, please respond." I make a brief report, then sag back onto the bed, all my strength drained.

Later, I have the orderly fetch me a wheelchair, and I check each of my patients. I remove all their harnesses; nobody is in any condition to leap from their bed and assault me. Greta has somehow managed to half-turn onto her side, pinning her right arm, and she whimpers horribly as I free her. The skin of her forearm is soft and gray. I anesthetize her and inspect it. A few more days, and nothing would have saved her from amputation. I pump her full of antibiotics and tissue-repair nanomachines; she'll need a graft, eventually, but for now all I can do is hold the necrosis in check.

It finally occurs to me to worry about *Cyclops* itself, but the drive computer's error log is empty of all but the most trivial complaints, and the navigation system reports that we are holding precisely to the flight plan.

Where are we? Still further from home than we were when the mission was canceled, but at least now we're headed in the right direction.

The flight plan is a blue trace on the screen of the terminal, a plot of distance versus time. The U-turn is an upside-down parabola—minutely distorted by relativistic effects, but not enough for the eye to tell. The blue line itself is pure theory, but at regular intervals along the curve are small green crosses, marking estimates of our actual location as

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computed by the navigation system. It's the most natural thing in the world for the eye to leap across the curve and read off the time at which *Cyclops* was last at the same position as it is right now.

That was eighteen days ago. The day I succumbed.

I feel an almost physical shock, even before I consciously make the connection: *Lidia may have been right. Perhaps there is something out here.* I look around, in vain, for someone to argue me back to my senses.

It could easily be a coincidence. One isolated piece of data means nothing. I set the computer to work at once, analyzing the records of every instrument inside and outside the hull of *Cyclops*, searching for some evidence that the region of space from which we are now emerging is in any way distinctive.

The task is trivial, the answer is produced with no perceptible delay. Apart from a steady and predictable decline in the faint remnants of the solar wind—nothing. And so far as the instruments *inside* the shielded hull are concerned, we might have spent the last three weeks standing still, on the surface of a planet with gravity of 1.3 gees.

I'd be willing to believe that interstellar space might hold some dangerous surprise—I'd admit the possibility of some peril inexplicable in terms of current astrophysics, maybe even current physics itself—but to believe in a phenomenon that has *absolutely no effect* on any one of the hundreds of delicate instruments we're carrying, and yet can somehow cause a subtle dysfunction of the human nervous system, would be anthropocentric to the point of insanity.

I go back over the infirmary's log, and find the moment when Lidia last spoke to me. I check the flight plan; in ten hours' time, we'll pass through the same location.

The orderly starts feeding the patients, but I interrupt it and take over myself. Eighteen days of confinement has knocked the aggression out of all of them. The docility with which they accept the food makes the job easy, but it shakes me up. *Half a day ago, I was just like this.* There goes the vanity that supposedly keeps me sane; my brain is the same machine as everyone else's, my precious intellect can be switched off, and switched on again, by nothing more profound than the stages in a virus's life cycle.

It's still too soon for a response from Earth to my message. I leave the infirmary and move around the ship in my wheelchair. Everything is as we left it, of course. I'm still horribly weak and aching all over, from being bedridden for so long, but the gravity as such no longer seems oppressive. The cabins all look so familiar, so mundane, that the idea that we are, even now, further from Earth than anyone has ever been before, seems preposterous.

As the ceiling panels slowly dim in their mimickry of dusk, I can't help myself; I sit by Lidia's bed and wait for the magic time, certain as I am

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that nothing is going to happen. She's asleep, but makes small, unhappy noises every now and then.

The coincidence of the onset and departure of my symptoms keeps nagging at me, but there's no getting around it; the precision, the specificity, of the effect screams out the word *adaptation*. The only cause that makes sense is one that can be traced back to the Earth's biosphere.

Lidia cries out. I check my watch; the time has passed. I pat her hand, and start to wheel myself away. She opens her eyes, and suddenly bursts into tears, sobbing and shaking. I pause, momentarily unable to move or speak. She turns her head and sees me.

Her voice is slurred, but her words are unmistakable. "David? Are we home?"

I lean over and hold her in my arms.

I wouldn't call it a theory yet; we have no mechanism, no clear hypothesis. Kay speculates that some kind of quantum correlation effect may be involved; every human being contains thousands of genes that are, ultimately, copied from the same common ancestors, and like the polarized photons of the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen experiment, there may be some indelible link established by this history of microscopic intimacy. There are at least two problems with this; the EPR effect is supposedly incapable of communicating anything but random quantum noise; and in any case, it ought not to diminish at all with distance. Kay is undaunted. "*Any* theory that predicts an effect that works at infinity is nonsense," she says. "In flat, empty spacetime, maybe, but not in the real universe. And just because you can pronounce the word 'random,' don't kid yourself that you know what it means."

What's special, about being ten billion kilometers from Earth, as opposed to ten thousand or ten million? Distance, that's all. We didn't just evolve on a planetary surface, with air and water and gravity. We evolved in the presence of *each other*. It seems that the refinement of human consciousness made use of that fact. *Relied on* that fact.

The media releases back on Earth have mentioned none of this; mission control is keeping quiet about the rantings of eight people who have been through an ordeal. The mystery disease has mysteriously spared us, and no doubt we will be quarantined while the experts diligently hunt for the non-existent virus. The truth, though, won't stay buried for long.

Will genocide still be thinkable, in a world where every human being relies for their humanity on every other?

I hope not. ●



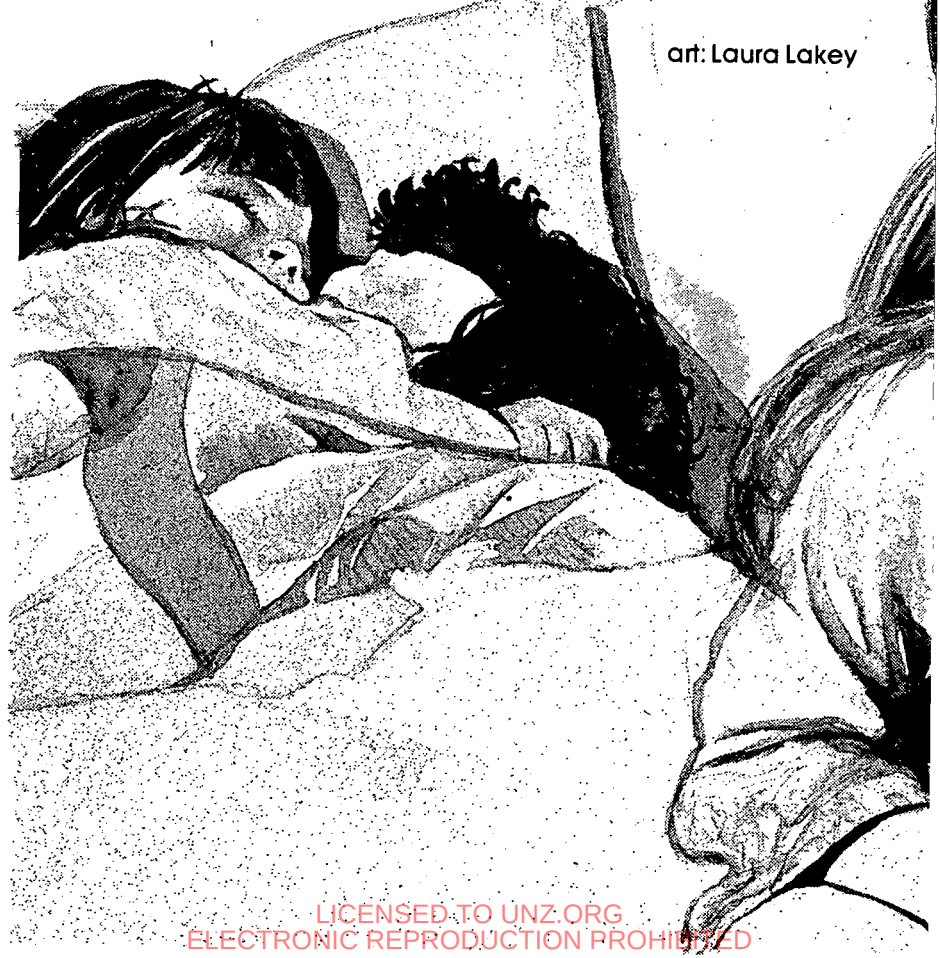
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BEGGARS IN SPAIN

by Nancy Kress

In a not-too-distant future where babies can be "made-to-order," Nebula-award-winning author Nancy Kress takes a riveting look at what genetic modification will mean to those who are altered and to those who are not. Ms. Kress is the fiction columnist for *Writers' Digest*, and she is currently at work on a mainstream novel.

art: Laura Lakey



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"With energy and sleepless vigilance go forward and give us victories."
—Abraham Lincoln, to Major General Joseph Hooker, 1863

1

They sat stiffly on his antique Eames chairs, two people who didn't want to be here, or one person who didn't want to and one who resented the other's reluctance. Dr. Ong had seen this before. Within two minutes he was sure: the woman was the silently furious resister. She would lose. The man would pay for it later, in little ways, for a long time.

"I presume you've performed the necessary credit checks already," Roger Camden said pleasantly, "so let's get right on to details, shall we, doctor?"

"Certainly," Ong said. "Why don't we start by your telling me all the genetic modifications you're interested in for the baby."

The woman shifted suddenly on her chair. She was in her late twenties—clearly a second wife—but already had a faded look, as if keeping up with Roger Camden was wearing her out. Ong could easily believe that. Mrs. Camden's hair was brown, her eyes were brown, her skin had a brown tinge that might have been pretty if her cheeks had had any color. She wore a brown coat, neither fashionable nor cheap, and shoes that looked vaguely orthopedic. Ong glanced at his records for her name: Elizabeth. He would bet people forgot it often.

Next to her, Roger Camden radiated nervous vitality, a man in late middle age whose bullet-shaped head did not match his careful haircut and Italian-silk business suit. Ong did not need to consult his file to recall anything about Camden. A caricature of the bullet-shaped head had been the leading graphic of yesterday's on-line edition of the *Wall Street Journal:* Camden had led a major coup in cross-border data-atoll investment. Ong was not sure what cross-border data-atoll investment was.

"A girl," Elizabeth Camden said. Ong hadn't expected her to speak first. Her voice was another surprise: upper-class British. "Blonde. Green eyes. Tall. Slender."

Ong smiled. "Appearance factors are the easiest to achieve, as I'm sure you already know. But all we can do about 'slenderness' is give her a genetic disposition in that direction. How you feed the child will naturally—"

"Yes, yes," Roger Camden said, "that's obvious. Now: intelligence. *High* intelligence. And a sense of daring."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Camden—personality factors are not yet understood well enough to allow genet—"

"Just testing," Camden said, with a smile that Ong thought was probably supposed to be light-hearted.

Elizabeth Camden said, "Musical ability."

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"Again, Mrs. Camden, a disposition to be musical is all we can guarantee."

"Good enough," Camden said. "The full array of corrections for any potential gene-linked health problem, of course."

"Of course," Dr. Ong said. Neither client spoke. So far theirs was a fairly modest list, given Camden's money; most clients had to be argued out of contradictory genetic tendencies, alteration overload, or unrealistic expectations. Ong waited. Tension prickled in the room like heat.

"And," Camden said, "no need to sleep."

Elizabeth Camden jerked her head sideways to look out the window.

Ong picked a paper magnet off his desk. He made his voice pleasant. "May I ask how you learned whether that genetic-modification program exists?"

Camden grinned. "You're not denying it exists. I give you full credit for that, Doctor."

Ong held onto his temper. "May I ask how you learned whether the program exists?"

Camden reached into an inner pocket of his suit. The silk crinkled and pulled; body and suit came from different social classes. Camden was, Ong remembered, a Yagaiist, a personal friend of Kenzo Yagai himself. Camden handed Ong hard copy: program specifications.

"Don't bother hunting down the security leak in your data banks, Doctor—you won't find it. But if it's any consolation, neither will anybody else. Now." He leaned suddenly forward. His tone changed. "I know that you've created twenty children so far who don't need to sleep at all. That so far nineteen are healthy, intelligent, and psychologically normal. In fact, better than normal—they're all unusually precocious. The oldest is already four years old and can read in two languages. I know you're thinking of offering this genetic modification on the open market in a few years. All I want is a chance to buy it for my daughter *now*. At whatever price you name."

Ong stood. "I can't possibly discuss this with you unilaterally, Mr. Camden. Neither the theft of our data—"

"Which wasn't a theft—your system developed a spontaneous bubble regurgitation into a public gate, have a hell of a time proving otherwise—"

"—*nor* the offer to purchase this particular genetic modification lies in my sole area of authority. Both have to be discussed with the Institute's Board of Directors."

"By all means, by all means. When can I talk to them, too?"

"You?"

Camden, still seated, looked at him. It occurred to Ong that there were few men who could look so confident eighteen inches below eye level. "Certainly. I'd like the chance to present my offer to whoever has the actual authority to accept it. That's only good business."

"This isn't solely a business transaction, Mr. Camden."

"It isn't solely pure scientific research, either," Camden retorted.

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"You're a for-profit corporation here. *With* certain tax breaks available only to firms meeting certain fair-practice laws."

For a minute Ong couldn't think what Camden meant. "Fair-practice laws . . . "

" . . . are designed to protect minorities who are suppliers. I know, it hasn't ever been tested in the case of customers, except for red-lining in Y-energy installations. But it could be tested, Doctor Ong. Minorities are entitled to the same product offerings as non-minorities. I know the Institute would not welcome a court case, Doctor. None of your twenty genetic beta-test families are either Black or Jewish."

"A court . . . but you're not Black *or* Jewish!"

"I'm a different minority. Polish-American. The name was Kaminsky." Camden finally stood. And smiled warmly. "Look, it is preposterous. You know that, and I know that, and we both know what a grand time journalists would have with it anyway. And you know that I don't want to sue you with a preposterous case, just to use the threat of premature and adverse publicity to get what I want. I don't want to make threats at all, believe me I don't. I just want this marvelous advancement you've come up with for my daughter." His face changed, to an expression Ong wouldn't have believed possible on those particular features: wistfulness. "Doctor—do you know how much more I could have accomplished if I hadn't had to *sleep* all my life?"

Elizabeth Camden said harshly, "You hardly sleep now."

Camden looked down at her as if he had forgotten she was there. "Well, no, my dear, not now. But when I was young . . . college, I might have been able to finish college and still support . . . well. None of that matters now. What matters, Doctor, is that you and I and your board come to an agreement."

"Mr. Camden, please leave my office now."

"You mean before you lose your temper at my presumptuousness? You wouldn't be the first. I'll expect to have a meeting set up by the end of next week, whenever and wherever you say, of course. Just let my personal secretary, Diane Clavers, know the details. Anytime that's best for you."

Ong did not accompany them to the door. Pressure throbbed behind his temples. In the doorway Elizabeth Camden turned. "What happened to the twentieth one?"

"What?"

"The twentieth baby. My husband said nineteen of them are healthy and normal. What happened to the twentieth?"

The pressure grew stronger, hotter. Ong knew that he should not answer; that Camden probably already knew the answer even if his wife didn't; that he, Ong, was going to answer anyway; that he would regret the lack of self-control, bitterly, later.

"The twentieth baby is dead. His parents turned out to be unstable. They separated during the pregnancy, and his mother could not bear the twenty-four-hour crying of a baby who never sleeps."

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Elizabeth Camden's eyes widened. "She killed it?"

"By mistake," Camden said shortly. "Shook the little thing too hard." He frowned at Ong. "Nurses, Doctor. In shifts. You should have picked only parents wealthy enough to afford nurses in shifts."

"That's horrible!" Mrs. Camden burst out, and Ong could not tell if she meant the child's death, the lack of nurses, or the Institute's carelessness. Ong closed his eyes.

When they had gone, he took ten milligrams of cyclobenzaprine-III. For his back—it was solely for his back. The old injury hurting again. Afterward he stood for a long time at the window, still holding the paper magnet, feeling the pressure recede from his temples, feeling himself calm down. Below him Lake Michigan lapped peacefully at the shore; the police had driven away the homeless in another raid just last night, and they hadn't yet had time to return. Only their debris remained, thrown into the bushes of the lakeshore park: tattered blankets, newspapers, plastic bags like pathetic trampled standards. It was illegal to sleep in the park, illegal to enter it without a resident's permit, illegal to be homeless and without a residence. As Ong watched, uniformed park attendants began methodically spearing newspapers and shoving them into clean self-propelled receptacles.

Ong picked up the phone to call the President of Biotech Institute's Board of Directors.

Four men and three women sat around the polished mahogany table of the conference room. *Doctor, lawyer, Indian chief,* thought Susan Melling, looking from Ong to Sullivan to Camden. She smiled. Ong caught the smile and looked frosty. Pompous ass. Judy Sullivan, the Institute lawyer, turned to speak in a low voice to Camden's lawyer, a thin nervous man with the look of being owned. The owner, Roger Camden, the Indian chief himself, was the happiest-looking person in the room. The lethal little man—what did it take to become that rich, starting from nothing? She, Susan, would certainly never know—radiated excitement. He beamed, he glowed, so unlike the usual parents-to-be that Susan was intrigued. Usually the prospective daddies and mommies—especially the daddies—sat there looking as if they were at a corporate merger. Camden looked as if he were at a birthday party.

Which, of course, he was. Susan grinned at him, and was pleased when he grinned back. Wolfish, but with a sort of delight that could only be called innocent—what would he be like in bed? Ong frowned majestically and rose to speak.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I think we're ready to start. Perhaps introductions are in order. Mr. Roger Camden, Mrs. Camden, are of course our clients. Mr. John Jaworski, Mr. Camden's lawyer. Mr. Camden, this is Judith Sullivan, the Institute's head of Legal; Samuel Krenshaw, representing Institute Director Dr. Brad Marsteiner, who unfortunately couldn't be here today; and Dr. Susan Melling, who developed the genetic

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modification affecting sleep. A few legal points of interest to both parties—"

"Forget the contracts for a minute," Camden interrupted. "Let's talk about the sleep thing. I'd like to ask a few questions."

Susan said, "What would you like to know?" Camden's eyes were very blue in his blunt-featured face; he wasn't what she had expected. Mrs. Camden, who apparently lacked both a first name and a lawyer, since Jaworski had been introduced as her husband's but not hers, looked either sullen or scared, it was difficult to tell which.

Ong said sourly, "Then perhaps we should start with a short presentation by Dr. Melling."

Susan would have preferred a Q&A, to see what Camden would ask. But she had annoyed Ong enough for one session. Obediently she rose.

"Let me start with a brief description of sleep. Researchers have known for a long time that there are actually three kinds of sleep. One is 'slow-wave sleep,' characterized on an EEG by delta waves. One is 'rapid-eye-movement sleep,' or REM sleep, which is much lighter sleep and contains most dreaming. Together these two make up 'core sleep.' The third type of sleep is 'optional sleep,' so-called because people seem to get along without it with no ill effects, and some short sleepers don't do it at all, sleeping naturally only 3 or 4 hours a night."

"That's me," Camden said. "I trained myself into it. Couldn't everybody do that?"

Apparently they were going to have a Q&A after all. "No. The actual sleep mechanism has some flexibility, but not the same amount for every person. The raphe nuclei on the brain stem—"

Ong said, "I don't think we need that level of detail, Susan. Let's stick to basics."

Camden said, "The raphe nuclei regulate the balance among neurotransmitters and peptides that lead to a pressure to sleep, don't they?"

Susan couldn't help it; she grinned. Camden, the laser-sharp ruthless financier, sat trying to look solemn, a third-grader waiting to have his homework praised. Ong looked sour. Mrs. Camden looked away, out the window.

"Yes, that's correct, Mr. Camden. You've done your research."

Camden said, "This is my *daughter*," and Susan caught her breath. When was the last time she had heard that note of reverence in anyone's voice? But no one in the room seemed to notice.

"Well, then," Susan said, "you already know that the reason people sleep is because a pressure to sleep builds up in the brain. Over the last twenty years, research has determined that's the *only* reason. Neither slow-wave sleep nor REM sleep serve functions that can't be carried on while the body and brain are awake. A lot goes on during sleep, but it can go on awake just as well, if other hormonal adjustments are made.

"Sleep once served an important evolutionary function. Once Clem Pre-Mammal was done filling his stomach and squirting his sperm around, sleep kept him immobile and away from predators. Sleep was

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an aid to survival. But now it's a left-over mechanism, like the appendix. It switches on every night, but the need is gone. So we turn off the switch at its source, in the genes."

Ong winced. He hated it when she oversimplified like that. Or maybe it was the light-heartedness he hated. If Marsteiner were making this presentation, there'd be no Clem Pre-Mammal.

Camden said, "What about the need to dream?"

"Not necessary. A left-over bombardment of the cortex to keep it on semi-alert in case a predator attacked during sleep. Wakefulness does that better."

"Why not have wakefulness instead then? From the start of the evolution?"

He was testing her. Susan gave him a full, lavish smile, enjoying his brass. "I told you. Safety from predators. But when a modern predator attacks—say, a cross-border data atoll investor—it's safer to be awake."

Camden shot at her, "What about the high percentage of REM sleep in fetuses and babies?"

"Still an evolutionary hangover. Cerebrum develops perfectly well without it."

"What about neural repair during slow-wave sleep?"

"That does go on. But it can go on during wakefulness, if the DNA is programmed to do so. No loss of neural efficiency, as far as we know."

"What about the release of human growth enzyme in such large concentrations during slow-wave sleep?"

Susan looked at him admiringly. "Goes on without the sleep. Genetic adjustments tie it to other changes in the pineal gland."

"What about the—"

"The *side effects?*" Mrs. Camden said. Her mouth turned down. "What about the bloody side effects?"

Susan turned to Elizabeth Camden. She had forgotten she was there. The younger woman stared at Susan, mouth turned down at the corners.

"I'm glad you asked that, Mrs. Camden. Because there *are* side effects." Susan paused; she was enjoying herself. "Compared to their age mates, the non-sleep children—who have *not* had IQ genetic manipulation—are more intelligent, better at problem-solving, and more joyous."

Camden took out a cigarette. The archaic, filthy habit surprised Susan. Then she saw that it was deliberate: Roger Camden drawing attention to an ostentatious display to draw attention away from what he was feeling. His cigarette lighter was gold, monogrammed, innocently gaudy.

"Let me explain," Susan said. "REM sleep bombards the cerebral cortex with random neural firings from the brainstem; dreaming occurs because the poor besieged cortex tries so hard to make sense of the activated images and memories. It spends a lot of energy doing that. Without that energy expenditure, non-sleep cerebrums save the wear-and-tear and do better at coordinating real-life input. Thus—greater intelligence and problem-solving.

"Also, doctors have known for sixty years that anti-depressants, which

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lift the mood of depressed patients, also suppress REM sleep entirely. What they have proved in the last ten years is that the reverse is equally true: suppress REM sleep and people don't *get* depressed. The non-sleep kids are cheerful, outgoing . . . *joyous*. There's no other word for it."

"At what cost?" Mrs. Camden said. She held her neck rigid, but the corners of her jaw worked.

"No cost. No negative side effects at all."

"So far," Mrs. Camden shot back.

Susan shrugged. "So far."

"They're only four years old! At the most!"

Ong and Krenshaw were studying her closely. Susan saw the moment the Camden woman realized it; she sank back into her chair, drawing her fur coat around her, her face blank.

Camden did not look at his wife. He blew a cloud of cigarette smoke. "Everything has costs, Dr. Melling."

She liked the way he said her name. "Ordinarily, yes. Especially in genetic modification. But we honestly have not been able to find any here, despite looking." She smiled directly into Camden's eyes. "Is it too much to believe that just once the universe has given us something wholly good, wholly a step forward, wholly beneficial? Without hidden penalties?"

"Not the universe. The intelligence of people like you," Camden said, surprising Susan more than anything else that had gone before. His eyes held hers. She felt her chest tighten.

"I think," Dr. Ong said dryly, "that the philosophy of the universe may be beyond our concerns here. Mr. Camden, if you have no further medical questions, perhaps we can return to the legal points Ms. Sullivan and Mr. Jaworski have raised. Thank you, Dr. Melling."

Susan nodded. She didn't look again at Camden. But she knew what he said, how he looked, that he was there.

The house was about what she had expected, a huge mock Tudor on Lake Michigan north of Chicago. The land heavily wooded between the gate and the house, open between the house and the surging water. Patches of snow dotted the dormant grass. Biotech had been working with the Camdens for four months, but this was the first time Susan had driven to their home.

As she walked toward the house, another car drove up behind her. No, a truck, continuing around the curved driveway to a service entry at the side of the house. One man rang the service bell; a second began to unload a plastic-wrapped playpen from the back of the truck. White, with pink and yellow bunnies. Susan briefly closed her eyes.

Camden opened the door himself. She could see the effort not to look worried. "You didn't have to drive out, Susan—I'd have come into the city!"

"No, I didn't want you to do that, Roger. Mrs. Camden is here?"

"In the living room." Camden led her into a large room with a stone

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fireplace. English country-house furniture; prints of dogs or boats, all hung eighteen inches too high: Elizabeth Camden must have done the decorating. She did not rise from her wing chair as Susan entered.

"Let me be concise and fast," Susan said, "I don't want to make this any more drawn-out for you than I have to. We have all the amniocentesis, ultrasound, and Langston test results. The fetus is fine, developing normally for two weeks, no problems with the implant on the uterus wall. But a complication has developed."

"What?" Camden said. He took out a cigarette, looked at his wife, put it back unlit.

Susan said quietly, "Mrs. Camden, by sheer chance both your ovaries released eggs last month. We removed one for the gene surgery. By more sheer chance the second fertilized and implanted. You're carrying two fetuses."

Elizabeth Camden grew still. "Twins?"

"No," Susan said. Then she realized what she had said. "I mean, yes. They're twins, but non-identical. Only one has been genetically altered. The other will be no more similar to her than any two siblings. It's a so-called 'normal' baby. And I know you didn't want a so-called normal baby."

Camden said, "No. I didn't."

Elizabeth Camden said, "I did."

Camden shot her a fierce look that Susan couldn't read. He took out the cigarette again, lit it. His face was in profile to Susan, thinking intently; she doubted he knew the cigarette was there, or that he was lighting it. "Is the baby being affected by the other one's being there?"

"No," Susan said. "No, of course not. They're just . . . co-existing."

"Can you abort it?"

"Not without risk of aborting both of them. Removing the unaltered fetus might cause changes in the uterus lining that could lead to a spontaneous miscarriage of the other." She drew a deep breath. "There's that option, of course. We can start the whole process over again. But as I told you at the time, you were very lucky to have the in vitro fertilization take on only the second try. Some couples take eight or ten tries. If we started all over, the process could be a lengthy one."

Camden said, "Is the presence of this second fetus harming my daughter? Taking away nutrients or anything? Or will it change anything for her later on in the pregnancy?"

"No. Except that there is a chance of premature birth. Two fetuses take up a lot more room in the womb, and if it gets too crowded, birth can be premature. But the—"

"How premature? Enough to threaten survival?"

"Most probably not."

Camden went on smoking. A man appeared at the door. "Sir, London calling. James Kendall for Mr. Yagai."

"I'll take it." Camden rose. Susan watched him study his wife's face.

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When he spoke, it was to her. "All right, Elizabeth. All right." He left the room.

For a long moment the two women sat in silence. Susan was aware of disappointment; this was not the Camden she had expected to see. She became aware of Elizabeth Camden watching her with amusement.

"Oh, yes, Doctor. He's like that."

Susan said nothing.

"Completely overbearing. But not this time." She laughed softly, with excitement. "Two. Do you . . . do you know what sex the other one is?"

"Both fetuses are female."

"I wanted a girl, you know. And now I'll have one."

"Then you'll go ahead with the pregnancy."

"Oh, yes. Thank you for coming, Doctor."

She was dismissed. No one saw her out. But as she was getting into her car, Camden rushed out of the house, coatless. "Susan! I wanted to thank you. For coming all the way out here to tell us yourself."

"You already thanked me."

"Yes. Well. You're sure the second fetus is no threat to my daughter?"

Susan said deliberately, "Nor is the genetically altered fetus a threat to the naturally conceived one."

He smiled. His voice was low and wistful. "And you think that should matter to me just as much. But it doesn't. And why should I fake what I feel? Especially to you?"

Susan opened her car door. She wasn't ready for this, or she had changed her mind, or something. But then Camden leaned over to close the door, and his manner held no trace of flirtatiousness, no smarmy ingratiation. "I better order a second playpen."

"Yes."

"And a second car seat."

"Yes."

"But not a second night-shift nurse."

"That's up to you."

"And you." Abruptly he leaned over and kissed her, a kiss so polite and respectful that Susan was shocked. Neither lust nor conquest would have shocked her; this did. Camden didn't give her a chance to react; he closed the car door and turned back toward the house. Susan drove toward the gate, her hands shaky on the wheel until amusement replaced shock: It *had* been a deliberately distant, respectful kiss, an engineered enigma. And nothing else could have guaranteed so well that there would have to be another.

She wondered what the Camdens would name their daughters.

Dr. Ong strode the hospital corridor, which had been dimmed to half-light. From the nurse's station in Maternity a nurse stepped forward as if to stop him—it was the middle of the night, long past visiting hours—got a good look at his face, and faded back into her station. Around a corner was the viewing glass to the nursery. To Ong's annoy-

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ance, Susan Melling stood pressed against the glass. To his further annoyance, she was crying.

Ong realized that he had never liked the woman. Maybe not any women. Even those with superior minds could not seem to refrain from being made damn fools by their emotions.

"Look," Susan said, laughing a little, swiping at her face. "Doctor—*look*."

Behind the glass Roger Camden, gowned and masked, was holding up a baby in white undershirt and pink blanket. Camden's blue eyes—theatrically blue, a man really should not have such garish eyes—glowed. The baby had a head covered with blond fuzz, wide eyes, pink skin. Camden's eyes above the mask said that no other child had ever had these attributes.

Ong said, "An uncomplicated birth?"

"Yes," Susan Melling sobbed. "Perfectly straightforward. Elizabeth is fine. She's asleep. Isn't she beautiful? He has the most adventurous spirit I've ever known." She wiped her nose on her sleeve; Ong realized that she was drunk. "Did I ever tell you that I was engaged once? Fifteen years ago, in med school? I broke it off because he grew to seem so ordinary, so boring. Oh, God, I shouldn't be telling you all this I'm sorry I'm sorry."

Ong moved away from her. Behind the glass Roger Camden laid the baby in a small wheeled crib. The nameplate said BABY GIRL CAMDEN #1. 5.9 POUNDS. A night nurse watched indulgently.

Ong did not wait to see Camden emerge from the nursery or to hear Susan Melling say to him whatever she was going to say. Ong went to have the OB paged. Melling's report was not, under the circumstances, to be trusted. A perfect, unprecedented chance to record every detail of gene-alteration with a non-altered control, and Melling was more interested in her own sloppy emotions. Ong would obviously have to do the report himself, after talking to the OB. He was hungry for every detail. And not just about the pink-cheeked baby in Camden's arms. He wanted to know everything about the birth of the child in the other glass-sided crib: BABY GIRL CAMDEN #2. 5.1 POUNDS. The dark-haired baby with the mottled red features, lying scrunched down in her pink blanket, asleep.

II

Leisha's earliest memory was of flowing lines that were not there. She knew they were not there because when she reached out her fist to touch them, her fist was empty. Later she realized that the flowing lines were light: sunshine slanting in bars between curtains in her room, between the wooden blinds in the dining room, between the criss-cross lattices in the conservatory. The day she realized the golden flow was light she laughed out loud with the sheer joy of discovery, and Daddy turned from putting flowers in pots and smiled at her.

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The whole house was full of light. Light bounded off the lake, streamed across the high white ceilings, puddled on the shining wooden floors. She and Alice moved continually through light, and sometimes Leisha would stop and tip back her head and let it flow over her face. She could feel it, like water.

The best light, of course, was in the conservatory. That's where Daddy liked to be when he was home from making money. Daddy potted plants and watered trees, humming, and Leisha and Alice ran between the wooden tables of flowers with their wonderful earthy smells, running from the dark side of the conservatory where the big purple flowers grew to the sunshine side with sprays of yellow flowers, running back and forth, in and out of the light. "Growth," Daddy said to her, "flowers all fulfilling their promise. Alice, be careful! You almost knocked over that orchid!" Alice, obedient, would stop running for a while. Daddy never told Leisha to stop running.

After a while the light would go away. Alice and Leisha would have their baths, and then Alice would get quiet, or cranky. She wouldn't play nice with Leisha, even when Leisha let her choose the game or even have all the best dolls. Then Nanny would take Alice to "bed," and Leisha would talk with Daddy some more until Daddy said he had to work in his study with the papers that made money. Leisha always felt a moment of regret that he had to go do that, but the moment never lasted very long because Mamselle would arrive and start Leisha's lessons, which she liked. Learning things was so interesting! She could already sing twenty songs and write all the letters in the alphabet and count to fifty. And by the time lessons were done, the light had come back, and it was time for breakfast.

Breakfast was the only time Leisha didn't like. Daddy had gone to the office, and Leisha and Alice had breakfast with Mommy in the big dining room. Mommy sat in a red robe, which Leisha liked, and she didn't smell funny or talk funny the way she would later in the day, but still breakfast wasn't fun. Mommy always started with The Question.

"Alice, sweetheart, how did you sleep?"

"Fine, Mommy."

"Did you have any nice dreams?"

For a long time Alice said no. Then one day she said, "I dreamed about a horse. I was riding him." Mommy clapped her hands and kissed Alice and gave her an extra sticky bun. After that Alice always had a dream to tell Mommy.

Once Leisha said, "I had a dream, too. I dreamed light was coming in the window and it wrapped all around me like a blanket and then it kissed me on my eyes."

Mommy put down her coffee cup so hard that coffee sloshed out of it. "Don't lie to me, Leisha. You did not have a dream."

"Yes, I did," Leisha said.

"Only children who sleep can have dreams. Don't lie to me. You did not have a dream."

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"Yes I did! I did!" Leisha shouted. She could see it, almost: The light streaming in the window and wrapping around her like a golden blanket.

"I will not tolerate a child who is a liar! Do you hear me, Leisha—I won't tolerate it!"

"You're a liar!" Leisha shouted, knowing the words weren't true, hating herself because they weren't true but hating Mommy more and that was wrong, too, and there sat Alice stiff and frozen with her eyes wide, Alice was scared and it was Leisha's fault.

Mommy called sharply, "Nanny! Nanny! Take Leisha to her room at once. She can't sit with civilized people if she can't refrain from telling lies!"

Leisha started to cry. Nanny carried her out of the room. Leisha hadn't even had her breakfast. But she didn't care about that; all she could see while she cried was Alice's eyes, scared like that, reflecting broken bits of light.

But Leisha didn't cry long. Nanny read her a story, and then played Data Jump with her, and then Alice came up and Nanny drove them both into Chicago to the zoo where there were wonderful animals to see, animals Leisha could not have dreamed—nor Alice *either*. And by the time they came back Mommy had gone to her room and Leisha knew that she would stay there with the glasses of funny-smelling stuff the rest of the day and Leisha would not have to see her.

But that night, she went to her mother's room.

"I have to go to the bathroom," she told Mamselle. Mamselle said, "Do you need any help?" maybe because Alice still needed help in the bathroom. But Leisha didn't, and she thanked Mamselle. Then she sat on the toilet for a minute even though nothing came, so that what she had told Mamselle wouldn't be a lie.

Leisha tiptoed down the hall. She went first into Alice's room. A little light in a wall socket burned near the "crib." There was no crib in Leisha's room. Leisha looked at her sister through the bars. Alice lay on her side, with her eyes closed. The lids of the eyes fluttered quickly, like curtains blowing in the wind. Alice's chin and neck looked loose.

Leisha closed the door very carefully and went to her parents' room.

They didn't "sleep" in a crib but in a huge enormous "bed," with enough room between them for more people. Mommy's eyelids weren't fluttering; she lay on her back making a hrrr-hrrr sound through her nose. The funny smell was strong on her. Leisha backed away and tiptoed over to Daddy. He looked like Alice, except that his neck and chin looked even looser, folds of skin collapsed like the tent that had fallen down in the backyard. It scared Leisha to see him like that. Then Daddy's eyes flew open so suddenly that Leisha screamed.

Daddy rolled out of bed and picked her up, looking quickly at Mommy. But she didn't move. Daddy was wearing only his underpants. He carried Leisha out into the hall, where Mamselle came rushing up saying, "Oh, sir, I'm sorry, she just said she was going to the bathroom—".

"It's all right," Daddy said. "I'll take her with me."

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"No!" Leisha screamed, because Daddy was only in his underpants and his neck had looked all funny and the room smelled bad because of Mommy. But Daddy carried her into the conservatory, set her down on a bench, wrapped himself in a piece of green plastic that was supposed to cover up plants, and sat down next to her.

"Now, what happened, Leisha? What were you doing?"

Leisha didn't answer.

"You were looking at people sleeping, weren't you?" Daddy said, and because his voice was softer Leisha mumbled, "Yes." She immediately felt better; it felt good not to lie.

"You were looking at people sleeping because you don't sleep and you were curious, weren't you? Like Curious George in your book?"

"Yes," Leisha said. "I thought you said you made money in your study all night!"

Daddy smiled. "Not all night. Some of it. But then I sleep, although not very much." He took Leisha on his lap. "I don't need much sleep, so I get a lot more done at night than most people. Different people need different amounts of sleep. And a few, a very few, are like you. You don't need any."

"Why not?"

"Because you're special. Better than other people. Before you were born, I had some doctors help make you that way."

"Why?"

"So you could do anything you want to and make manifest your own individuality."

Leisha twisted in his arms to stare at him; the words meant nothing. Daddy reached over and touched a single flower growing on a tall potted tree. The flower had thick white petals like the cream he put in coffee, and the center was a light pink.

"See, Leisha—this tree made this flower. Because it *can*. Only this tree can make this kind of wonderful flower. That plant hanging up there can't, and those can't either. Only this tree. Therefore the most important thing in the world for this tree to do is grow this flower. The flower is the tree's individuality—that means just *it*, and nothing else—made manifest. Nothing else matters."

"I don't understand, Daddy."

"You will. Someday."

"But I want to understand *now*," Leisha said, and Daddy laughed with pure delight and hugged her. The hug felt good, but Leisha still wanted to understand.

"When you make money, is that your indiv . . . that thing?"

"Yes," Daddy said happily.

"Then nobody else can make money? Like only that tree can make that flower?"

"Nobody else can make it just the ways I do."

"What do you do with the money?"

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"I buy things for you. This house, your dresses, Mamselle to teach you, the car to ride in."

"What does the tree do with the flower?"

"Glories in it," Daddy said, which made no sense. "Excellence is what counts, Leisha. Excellence supported by individual effort. And that's *all* that counts."

"I'm cold, Daddy."

"Then I better bring you back to Mamselle."

Leisha didn't move. She touched the flower with one finger. "I want to sleep, Daddy."

"No, you don't, sweetheart. Sleep is just lost time, wasted life. It's a little death."

"Alice sleeps."

"Alice isn't like you."

"Alice isn't special?"

"No. You are."

"Why didn't you make Alice special, too?"

"Alice made herself. I didn't have a chance to make her special."

The whole thing was too hard. Leisha stopped stroking the flower and slipped off Daddy's lap. He smiled at her. "My little questioner. When you grow up, you'll find your own excellence, and it will be a new order, a specialness the world hasn't ever seen before. You might even be like Kenzo Yagai. He made the Yagai generator that powers the world."

"Daddy, you look funny wrapped in the flower plastic." Leisha laughed. Daddy did, too. But then she said, "When I grow up, I'll make my specialness find a way to make Alice special, too," and Daddy stopped laughing.

He took her back to Mamselle, who taught her to write her name, which was so exciting she forget about the puzzling talk with Daddy. There were six letters, all different, and together they were *her name.* Leisha wrote it over and over, laughing, and Mamselle laughed too. But later, in the morning, Leisha thought again about the talk with Daddy. She thought of it often, turning the unfamiliar words over and over in her mind like small hard stones, but the part she thought about most wasn't a word. It was the frown on Daddy's face when she told him she would use her specialness to make Alice special, too.

Every week Dr. Melling came to see Leisha and Alice, sometimes alone, sometimes with other people. Leisha and Alice both liked Dr. Melling, who laughed a lot and whose eyes were bright and warm. Often Daddy was there, too. Dr. Melling played games with them, first with Alice and Leisha separately and then together. She took their pictures and weighed them. She made them lie down on a table and stuck little metal things to their temples, which sounded scary but wasn't because there were so many machines to watch, all making interesting noises, while you were lying there. Dr. Melling was as good at answering questions as Daddy. Once Leisha said, "Is Dr. Melling a special person? Like Kenzo Yagai?"

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And Daddy laughed and glanced at Dr. Melling and said, "Oh, yes, indeed."

When Leisha was five she and Alice started school. Daddy's driver took them every day into Chicago. They were in different rooms, which disappointed Leisha. The kids in Leisha's room were all older. But from the first day she adored school, with its fascinating science equipment and electronic drawers full of math puzzlers and other children to find countries on the map with. In half a year she had been moved to yet a different room, where the kids were still older, but they were nonetheless nice to her. Leisha started to learn Japanese. She loved drawing the beautiful characters on thick white paper. "The Sauley School was a good choice," Daddy said.

But Alice didn't like the Sauley School. She wanted to go to school on the same yellow bus as Cook's daughter. She cried and threw her paints on the floor at the Sauley School. Then Mommy came out of her room—Leisha hadn't seen her for a few weeks, although she knew Alice had—and threw some candlesticks from the mantlepiece on the floor. The candlesticks, which were china, broke. Leisha ran to pick up the pieces while Mommy and Daddy screamed at each other in the hall by the big staircase.

"She's my daughter, too! And I say she can go!"

"You don't have the right to say anything about it! A weepy drunk, the most rotten role model possible for both of them . . . and I thought I was getting a fine English aristocrat!"

"You got what you paid for! Nothing! Not that you ever needed anything from me or anybody else!"

"Stop it!" Leisha cried. "Stop it!" and there was silence in the hall. Leisha cut her fingers on the china; blood streamed onto the rug. Daddy rushed in and picked her up. "Stop it," Leisha sobbed, and didn't understand when Daddy said quietly, "*You* stop it, Leisha. Nothing *they* do should touch you at all. You have to be at least that strong."

Leisha buried her head in Daddy's shoulder. Alice transferred to Carl Sandburg Elementary School, riding there on the yellow school bus with Cook's daughter.

A few weeks later Daddy told them that Mommy was going away for a few weeks to a hospital, to stop drinking so much. When Mommy came out, he said, she was going to live somewhere else for a while. She and Daddy were not happy. Leisha and Alice would stay with Daddy and they would visit Mommy sometimes. He told them this very carefully, finding the right words for truth. Truth was very important, Leisha already knew. Truth was being true to your self, your specialness. Your individuality. An individual respected facts, and so always told the truth.

Mommy, Daddy did not say but Leisha knew, did not respect facts.

"I don't want Mommy to go away," Alice said. She started to cry. Leisha thought Daddy would pick Alice up, but he didn't. He just stood there looking at them both.

Leisha put her arms around Alice. "It's all right, Alice. It's all right!

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We'll make it all right! I'll play with you all the time we're not in school so you don't miss Mommy!"

Alice clung to Leisha. Leisha turned her head so she didn't have to see Daddy's face.

III

Kenzo Yagai was coming to the United States to lecture. The title of his talk, which he would give in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, with a repeat in Washington as a special address to Congress, was "The Further Political Implications of Inexpensive Power." Leisha Camden, eleven years old, was going to have a private introduction after the Chicago talk, arranged by her father.

She had studied the theory of cold fusion at school, and her Global Studies teacher had traced the changes in the world resulting from Yagai's patented, low-cost applications of what had, until him, been unworkable theory. The rising prosperity of the Third World, the last death throes of the old communist systems, the decline of the oil states, the renewed economic power of the United States. Her study group had written a news script, filmed with the school's professional-quality equipment, about how a 1985 American family lived with expensive energy costs and a belief in tax-supported help, while a 2019 family lived with cheap energy and a belief in the contract as the basis of civilization. Parts of her own research puzzled Leisha.

"Japan thinks Kenzo Yagai was a traitor to his own country," she said to Daddy at supper.

"No," Camden said, "*Some* Japanese think that. Watch out for generalizations, Leisha. Yagai patented and marketed Y-energy first in the United States because here there were at least the dying embers of individual enterprise. Because of his invention, our entire country has slowly swung back toward an individual meritocracy, and Japan has slowly been forced to follow."

"Your father held that belief all along," Susan said. "Eat your peas, Leisha." Leisha ate her peas. Susan and Daddy had only been married less than a year; it still felt a little strange to have her there. But nice. Daddy said Susan was a valuable addition to their household: intelligent, motivated, and cheerful. Like Leisha herself.

"Remember, Leisha," Camden said, "a man's worth to society and to himself doesn't rest on what he thinks other people should do or be or feel, but on himself. On what he can actually do, and do well: People trade what they do well, and everyone benefits. The basic tool of civilization is the contract. Contracts are voluntary and mutually beneficial. As opposed to coercion, which is wrong."

"The strong have no right to take anything from the weak by force," Susan said. "Alice, eat your peas, too, honey."

"Nor the weak to take anything by force from the strong," Camden

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said. "That's the basis of what you'll hear Kenzo Yagai discuss tonight, Leisha."

Alice said, "I don't like peas."

Camden said, "Your body does. They're good for you."

Alice smiled. Leisha felt her heart lift; Alice didn't smile much at dinner any more. "My body doesn't have a contract with the peas."

Camden said, a little impatiently, "Yes, it does. Your body benefits from them. Now eat."

Alice's smile vanished. Leisha looked down at her plate. Suddenly she saw a way out. "No, Daddy, look—Alice's body benefits, but the peas don't! It's not a mutually beneficial consideration—so there's no contract! Alice is right!"

Camden let out a shout of laughter. To Susan he said, "Eleven years old . . . *eleven.*" Even Alice smiled, and Leisha waved her spoon triumphantly, light glinting off the bowl and dancing silver on the opposite wall.

But even so, Alice did not want to go hear Kenzo Yagai. She was going to sleep over at her friend Julie's house; they were going to curl their hair together. More surprisingly, Susan wasn't coming either. She and Daddy looked at each other a little funny at the front door, Leisha thought, but Leisha was too excited to think about this. She was going to hear *Kenzo Yagai.*

Yagai was a small man, dark and slim. Leisha liked his accent. She liked, too, something about him that took her a while to name. "Daddy," she whispered in the half-darkness of the auditorium, "he's a joyful man."

Daddy hugged her in the darkness.

Yagai spoke about spirituality and economics. "A man's spirituality —which is only his dignity as a man—rests on his own efforts. Dignity and worth are not automatically conferred by aristocratic birth—we have only to look at history to see that. Dignity and worth are not automatically conferred by inherited wealth—a great heir may be a thief, a wastrel, cruel, an exploiter, a person who leaves the world much poorer than he found it. Nor are dignity and worth automatically conferred by existence itself—a mass murderer exists, but is of negative worth to his society and possesses no dignity in his lust to kill.

"No, the only dignity, the only spirituality, rests on what a man can achieve with his own efforts. To rob a man of the chance to achieve, and to trade what he achieves with others, is to rob him of his spiritual dignity as a man. This is why communism has failed in our time. *All* coercion—all force to take from a man his own efforts to achieve—causes spiritual damage and weakens a society. Conscription, theft, fraud, violence, welfare, lack of legislative representation—*all* rob a man of his chance to choose, to achieve on his own, to trade the results of his achievement with others. Coercion is a cheat. It produces nothing new. Only freedom—the freedom to achieve, the freedom to trade freely the results of achievement—creates the environment proper to the dignity and spirituality of man."

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Leisha applauded so hard her hands hurt. Going backstage with Daddy, she thought she could hardly breathe. Kenzo Yagai!

But backstage was more crowded than she had expected. There were cameras everywhere. Daddy said, "Mr. Yagai, may I present my daughter Leisha," and the cameras moved in close and fast—on *her*. A Japanese man whispered something in Kenzo Yagai's ear, and he looked more closely at Leisha. "Ah, yes."

"Look over here, Leisha," someone called, and she did. A robot camera zoomed so close to her face that Leisha stepped back, startled. Daddy spoke very sharply to someone, then to someone else. The cameras didn't move. A woman suddenly knelt in front of Leisha and thrust a microphone at her. "What does it feel like to never sleep, Leisha?"

"What?"

Someone laughed. The laugh was not kind. "Breeding geniuses . . . "

Leisha felt a hand on her shoulder. Kenzo Yagai gripped her very firmly, pulled her away from the cameras. Immediately, as if by magic, a line of Japanese men formed behind Yagai, parting only to let Daddy through. Behind the line, the three of them moved into a dressing room, and Kenzo Yagai shut the door.

"You must not let them bother you, Leisha," he said in his wonderful accent. "Not ever. There is an old Oriental proverb: 'The dogs bark but the caravan moves on.' You must never let your individual caravan be slowed by the barking of rude or envious dogs."

"I won't," Leisha breathed, not sure yet what the words really meant, knowing there was time later to sort them out, to talk about them with Daddy. For now she was dazzled by Kenzo Yagai, the actual man himself who was changing the world without force, without guns, with trading his special individual efforts. "We study your philosophy at my school, Mr. Yagai."

Kenzo Yagai looked at Daddy. Daddy said, "A private school. But Leisha's sister also studies it, although cursorily, in the public system. Slowly, Kenzo, but it comes. It comes." Leisha noticed that he did not say why Alice was not here tonight with them.

Back home, Leisha sat in her room for hours, thinking over everything that had happened. When Alice came home from Julie's the next morning, Leisha rushed toward her. But Alice seemed angry about something.

"Alice—what is it?"

"Don't you think I have enough to put up with at school already?" Alice shouted. "Everybody knows, but at least when you stayed quiet it didn't matter too much! They'd stopped teasing me! Why did you have to do it?"

"Do what?" Leisha said, bewildered.

Alice threw something at her: a hard-copy morning paper, on newsprint flimsier than the Camden system used. The paper dropped open at Leisha's feet. She stared at her own picture, three columns wide, with Kenzo Yagai. The headline said YAGAI AND THE FUTURE: ROOM FOR THE REST OF US? Y-ENERGY INVENTOR CONFERS WITH

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'SLEEP-FREE' DAUGHTER OF MEGA-FINANCIER ROGER CAMDEN.

Alice kicked the paper. "It was on TV last night too—on *TV*. I work hard not to look stuck-up or creepy, and you go and do this! Now Julie probably won't even invite me to her slumber party next week!" She rushed up the broad curving stairs toward her room.

Leisha looked down at the paper. She heard Kenzo Yagai's voice in her head: "The dogs bark but the caravan moves on." She looked at the empty stairs. Aloud she said, "Alice—your hair looks really pretty curled like that."

IV

"I want to meet the rest of them," Leisha said. "Why have you kept them from me this long?"

"I haven't kept them from you at all," Camden said. "Not offering is not the same as denial. Why shouldn't you be the one to do the asking? You're the one who now wants it."

Leisha looked at him. She was 15, in her last year at the Sauley School. "Why didn't you offer?"

"Why should I?"

"I don't know," Leisha said. "But you gave me everything else."

"Including the freedom to ask for what you want."

Leisha looked for the contradiction, and found it. "Most things that you provided for my education I didn't ask for, because I didn't know enough to ask and you, as the adult, did. But you've never offered the opportunity for me to meet any of the other sleepless mutants—"

"Don't use that word," Camden said sharply.

"—so you must either think it was not essential to my education or else you had another motive for not wanting me to meet them."

"Wrong," Camden said. "There's a third possibility. That I think meeting them is essential to your education, that I do want you to, but this issue provided a chance to further the education of your self-initiative by waiting for *you* to ask."

"All right," Leisha said, a little defiantly; there seemed to be a lot of defiance between them lately, for no good reason. She squared her shoulders. Her new breasts thrust forward. "I'm asking. How many of the Sleepless are there, who are they, and where are they?"

Camden said, "If you're using that term— 'the Sleepless'—you've already done some reading on your own. So you probably know that there are 1,082 of you so far in the United States, a few more in foreign countries, most of them in major metropolitan areas. Seventy-nine are in Chicago, most of them still small children. Only nineteen anywhere are older than you."

Leisha didn't deny reading any of this. Camden leaned forward in his study chair to peer at her. Leisha wondered if he needed glasses. His hair

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was completely gray now, sparse and stiff, like lonely broomstraws. The *Wall Street Journal* listed him among the hundred richest men in America; *Women's Wear Daily* pointed out that he was the only billionaire in the country who did not move in the society of international parties, charity balls, and personal jets. Camden's jet ferried him to business meetings around the world, to the chairmanship of the Yagai Economics Institute, and to very little else. Over the years he had grown richer, more reclusive, and more cerebral. Leisha felt a rush of her old affection.

She threw herself sideways into a leather chair, her long slim legs dangling over the arm. Absently she scratched a mosquito bite on her thigh. "Well, then, I'd like to meet Richard Keller." He lived in Chicago and was the beta-test Sleepless closest to her own age. He was 17.

"Why ask me? Why not just go?"

Leisha thought there was a note of impatience in his voice. He liked her to explore things first, then report on them to him later. Both parts were important.

Leisha laughed. "You know what, Daddy? You're predictable."

Camden laughed, too. In the middle of the laugh Susan came in. "He certainly is not. Roger, what about that meeting in Buenos Aires Thursday? Is it on or off?" When he didn't answer, her voice grew shriller. "Roger? I'm talking to you!"

Leisha averted her eyes. Two years ago Susan had finally left genetic research to run Camden's house and schedule; before that she had tried hard to do both. Since she had left Biotech, it seemed to Leisha, Susan had changed. Her voice was tighter. She was more insistent that Cook and the gardener follow her directions exactly, without deviation. Her blonde braids had become stiff sculptured waves of platinum.

"It's on," Roger said.

"Well, thanks for at least answering. Am I going?"

"If you like."

"I like."

Susan left the room. Leisha rose and stretched. Her long legs rose on tiptoe. It felt good to reach, to stretch, to feel sunlight from the wide windows wash over her face. She smiled at her father, and found him watching her with an unexpected expression.

"Leisha—"

"What?"

"See Keller. But be careful."

"Of what?"

But Camden wouldn't answer.

The voice on the phone had been noncommital. "Leisha Camden? Yes, I know who you are. Three o'clock on Thursday?" The house was modest, a thirty-year-old Colonial on a quiet suburban street where small children on bicycles could be watched from the front window. Few roofs had more than one Y-energy cell. The trees, huge old sugar maples, were beautiful.

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"Come in," Richard Keller said.

He was no taller than she, stocky, with a bad case of acne. Probably no genetic alterations except sleep, Leisha guessed. He had thick dark hair, a low forehead, and bushy black brows. Before he closed the door Leisha saw his stare at her car and driver, parked in the driveway next to a rusty ten-speed bike.

"I can't drive yet," she said. "I'm still fifteen."

"It's easy to learn," Keller said. "So, you want to tell me why you're here?"

Leisha liked his directness. "To meet some other Sleepless."

"You mean you never have? Not any of us?"

"You mean the rest of you know each other?" She hadn't expected that.

"Come to my room, Leisha."

She followed him to the back of the house. No one else seemed to be home. His room was large and airy, filled with computers and filing cabinets. A rowing machine sat in one corner. It looked like a shabbier version of the room of any bright classmate at the Sauley School, except there was more space without a bed. She walked over to the computer screen.

"Hey—you working on Boesc equations?"

"On an application of them."

"To what?"

"Fish migration patterns."

Leisha smiled. "Yeah—that would work. I never thought of that."

Keller seemed not to know what to do with her smile. He looked at the wall, then at her chin. "You interested in Gaea patterns? In the environment?"

"Well, no," Leisha confessed. "Not particularly. I'm going to study politics at Harvard. Pre-law. But of course we had Gaea patterns at school."

Keller's gaze finally came unstuck from her face. He ran a hand through his dark hair. "Sit down, if you want."

Leisha sat, looking appreciatively at the wall posters, shifting green on blue, like ocean currents. "I like those. Did you program them yourself?"

"You're not at all what I pictured," Keller said.

"How did you picture me?"

He didn't hesitate. "Stuck-up. Superior. Shallow, despite your IQ."

She was more hurt than she had expected to be.

Keller blurted, "You're the only one of the Sleepless who's really rich. But you already know that."

"No, I don't. I've never checked."

He took the chair beside her, stretching his stocky legs straight in front of him, in a slouch that had nothing to do with relaxation. "It makes sense, really. Rich people don't have their children genetically modified to be superior—they think any offspring of theirs is already superior. By their values. And poor people can't afford it. We Sleepless are upper-

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middle class, no more. Children of professors, scientists, people who value brains and time."

"My father values brains and time," Leisha said. "He's the biggest supporter of Kenzo Yagai."

"Oh, Leisha, do you think I don't already know that? Are you flashing me or what?"

Leisha said with great deliberateness, "I'm *talking* to you." But the next minute she could feel the hurt break through on her face.

"I'm sorry," Keller muttered. He shot off his chair and paced to the computer, back. "I *am* sorry. But I don't . . . I don't understand what you're doing here."

"I'm lonely," Leisha said, astonished at herself. She looked up at him. "It's true. I'm lonely. I am. I have friends and Daddy and Alice—but no one really knows, really understands—what? I don't know what I'm saying."

Keller smiled. The smile changed his whole face, opened up its dark planes to the light. "I do. Oh, do I. What do you do when they say, 'I had such a dream last night!'?"

"Yes!" Leisha said. "But that's even really minor—it's when *I* say, 'I'll look that up for you tonight' and they get that funny look on their face that means 'She'll do it while I'm asleep.' "

"But that's even really minor," Keller said. "It's when you're playing basketball in the gym after supper and then you go to the diner for food and then you say 'Let's have a walk by the lake' and they say 'I'm really tired. I'm going home to bed now.' "

"But that's really minor," Leisha said, jumping up. "It's when you really are absorbed by the movie and then you get the point and it's so goddamn beautiful you leap up and say 'Yes! Yes!' and Susan says 'Leisha, really—you'd think nobody but you ever enjoyed anything before.' "

"Who's Susan?" Keller said.

The mood was broken. But not really; Leisha could say "My stepmother" without much discomfort over what Susan had promised to be and what she had become. Keller stood inches from her, smiling that joyous smile, understanding, and suddenly relief washed over Leisha so strong that she walked straight into him and put her arms around his neck, only tightening them when she felt his startled jerk. She started to sob—she, Leisha, who never cried.

"Hey," Richard said. "Hey."

"Brilliant," Leisha said, laughing. "Brilliant remark."

She could feel his embarrassed smile. "Wanta see my fish migration curves instead?"

"No," Leisha sobbed, and he went on holding her, patting her back awkwardly, telling her without words that she was home.

Camden waited up for her, although it was past midnight. He had been smoking heavily. Through the blue air he said quietly, "Did you have a good time, Leisha?"

"Yes."

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"I'm glad," he said, and put out his last cigarette, and climbed the stairs—slowly, stiffly, he was nearly seventy now—to bed.

They went everywhere together for nearly a year: swimming, dancing, to the museums, the theater, the library. Richard introduced her to the others, a group of twelve kids between fourteen and nineteen, all of them intelligent and eager. All Sleepless.

Leisha learned.

Tony's parents, like her own, had divorced. But Tony, fourteen, lived with his mother, who had not particularly wanted a Sleepless child, while his father, who had, acquired a red hovercar and a young girlfriend who designed ergonomic chairs in Paris. Tony was not allowed to tell anyone—relatives, schoolmates—that he was Sleepless. "They'll think you're a freak," his mother said, eyes averted from her son's face. The one time Tony disobeyed her and told a friend that he never slept, his mother beat him. Then she moved the family to a new neighborhood. He was nine years old.

Jeanine, almost as long-legged and slim as Leisha, was training for the Olympics in ice skating. She practiced twelve hours a day, hours no Sleeper still in high school could ever have. So far the newspapers had not picked up the story. Jeanine was afraid that, if they did, they would somehow not let her compete.

Jack, like Leisha, would start college in September. Unlike Leisha, he had already started his career. The practice of law had to wait for law school; the practice of investment required only money. Jack didn't have much, but his precise financial analyses parlayed $600 saved from summer jobs to $3000 through stock-market investing, then to $10,000, and then he had enough to qualify for information-fund speculation. Jack was fifteen, not old enough to make legal investments; the transactions were all in the name of Kevin Baker, the oldest of the Sleepless, who lived in Austin. Jack told Leisha, "When I hit 84 percent profit over two consecutive quarters, the data analysts logged onto me. They were just sniffing. Well, that's their job, even when the overall amounts are actually small. It's the patterns they care about. If they take the trouble to cross-reference data banks and come up with the fact that Kevin is a Sleepless, will they try to stop us from investing somehow?"

"That's paranoid," Leisha said.

"No, it's not," Jeanine said. "Leisha, you don't *know*."

"You mean because I've been protected by my father's money and caring," Leisha said. No one grimaced; all of them confronted ideas openly, without shadowy allusions. Without dreams.

"Yes," Jeanine said. "Your father sounds terrific. And he raised you to think that achievement should not be fettered—Jesus Christ, he's a Yagaiist. Well, good. We're glad for you." She said it without sarcasm. Leisha nodded. "But the world isn't always like that. They hate us."

"That's too strong," Carol said. "Not hate."

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"Well, maybe," Jeanine said. "But they're different from us. We're better, and they naturally resent that."

"I don't see what's natural about it," Tony said. "Why shouldn't it be just as natural to admire what's better? We do. Does any one of us resent Kenzo Yagai for his genius? Or Nelson Wade, the physicist? Or Catherine Raduski?"

"We don't resent them because we *are* better," Richard said. "Q.E.D."

"What we should do is have our own society," Tony said. "Why should we allow their regulations to restrict our natural, honest achievements? Why should Jeanine be barred from skating against them and Jack from investing on their same terms just because we're Sleepless? Some of them are brighter than others of them. Some have greater persistence. Well, we have greater concentration, more biochemical stability, and more time. All men are not created equal."

"Be fair, Jack—no one has been barred from anything yet," Jeanine said.

"But we will be."

"*Wait,*" Leisha said. She was deeply troubled by the conversation. "I mean, yes, in many ways we're better. But you quoted out of context, Tony. The Declaration of Independence doesn't say all men are created equal in ability. It's talking about rights and power—it means that all are created equal *under the law.* We have no more right to a separate society or to being free of society's restrictions than anyone else does. There's no other way to freely trade one's efforts, unless the same contractual rules apply to all."

"Spoken like a true Yagaiist," Richard said, squeezing her hand.

"That's enough intellectual discussion for me," Carol said, laughing. "We've been at this for hours. We're at the beach, for Chrissake. Who wants to swim with me?"

"I do," Jeanine said. "Come on, Jack."

All of them rose, brushing sand off their suits, discarding sunglasses. Richard pulled Leisha to her feet. But just before they ran into the water, Tony put his skinny hand on her arm. "One more question, Leisha. Just to think about. If we achieve better than most other people, and we trade with the Sleepers when it's mutually beneficial, making no distinction there between the strong and the weak—what obligation do we have to those so weak they don't have anything to trade with us? We're already going to give more than we get—do we have to do it when we get nothing at all? Do we have to take care of their deformed and handicapped and sick and lazy and shiftless with the products of our work?"

"Do the Sleeplers have to?" Leisha countered.

"Kenzo Yagai would say no. He's a Sleeper."

"He would say they would receive the benefits of contractual trade even if they aren't direct parties to the contract. The whole world is better-fed and healthier because of Y-energy."

"Come on!" Jeanine yelled. "Leisha, they're dunking me! Jack, you stop that! Leisha, help me!"

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Leisha laughed. Just before she grabbed for Jeanine, she caught the look on Richard's face, on Tony's: Richard frankly lustful, Tony angry. At her. But why? What had she done, except argue in favor of dignity and trade?

Then Jack threw water on her, and Carol pushed Jack into the warm spray, and Richard was there with his arms around her, laughing.

When she got the water out of her eyes, Tony was gone.

Midnight. "Okay," Carol said. "Who's first?"

The six teenagers in the brambled clearing looked at each other. A Y-lamp, kept on low for atmosphere, cast weird shadows across their faces and over their bare legs. Around the clearing Roger Camden's trees stood thick and dark, a wall between them and the closest of the estate's outbuildings. It was very hot. August air hung heavy, sullen. They had voted against bringing an air-conditioned Y-field because this was a return to the primitive, the dangerous; let it be primitive.

Six pairs of eyes stared at the glass in Carol's hand.

"Come *on*," she said. "Who wants to drink up?" Her voice was jaunty, theatrically hard. "It was difficult enough to get this."

"How *did* you get it?" said Richard, the group member—except for Tony—with the least influential family contacts, the least money. "In a drinkable form like that?"

"My cousin Brian is a pharmaceutical supplier to the Biotech Institute. He's curious." Nods around the circle; except for Leisha, they were Sleepless precisely because they had relatives somehow connected to Biotech. And everyone was curious. The glass held interleukin-1, an immune system booster, one of many substances which as a side effect induced the brain to swift and deep sleep.

Leisha stared at the glass. A warm feeling crept through her lower belly, not unlike the feeling when she and Richard made love.

Tony said, "Give it to me!"

Carol did. "Remember—you only need a little sip."

Tony raised the glass to his mouth, stopped, looked at them over the rim from his fierce eyes. He drank.

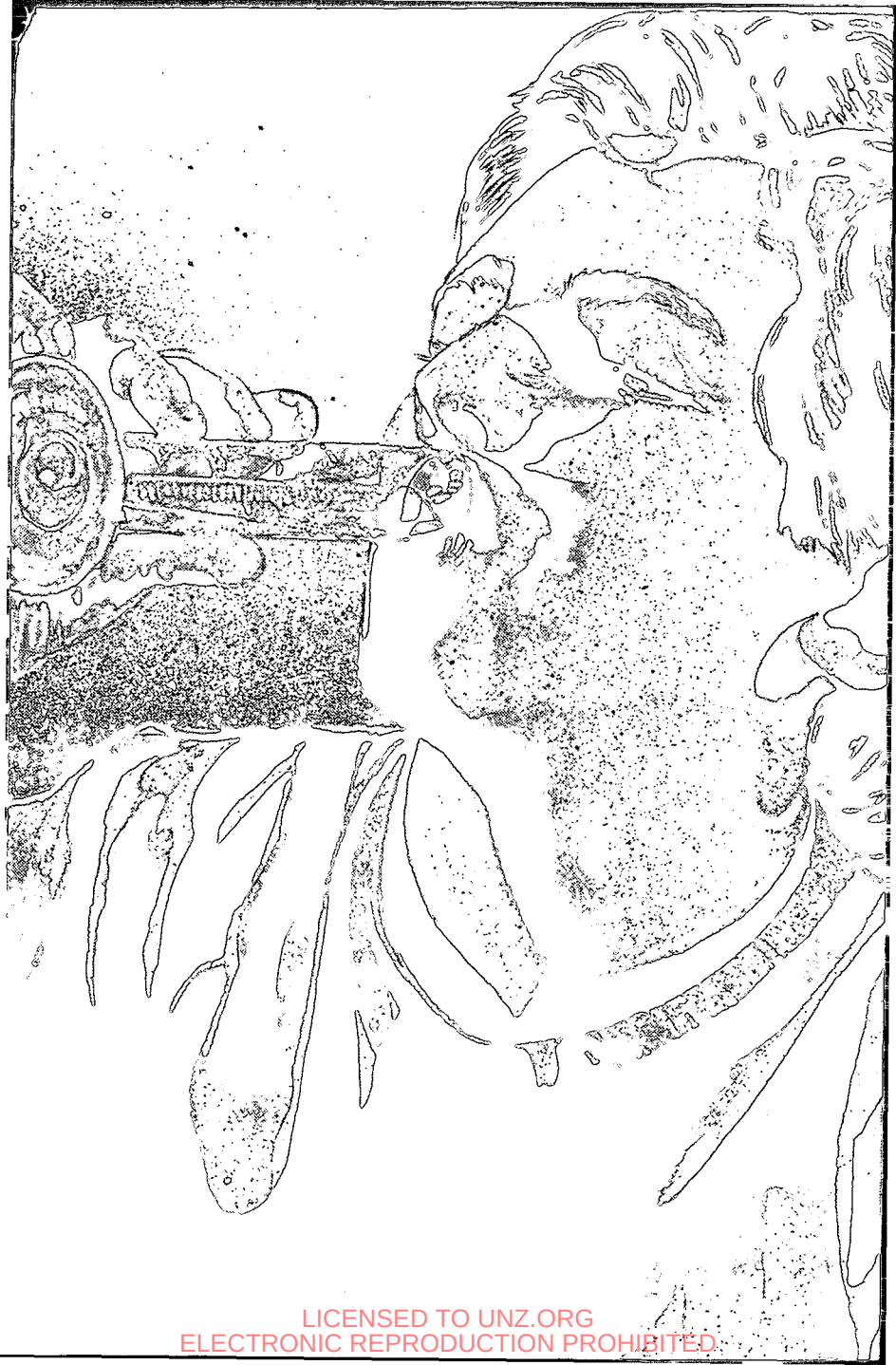
Carol took back the glass. They all watched Tony. Within a minute he lay on the rough ground; within two, his eyes closed in sleep.

It wasn't like seeing parents sleep, siblings, friends. It was Tony. They looked away, didn't meet each other's eyes. Leisha felt the warmth between her legs tug and tingle, faintly obscene.

When it was her turn, she drank slowly, then passed the glass to Jeanine. Her head turned heavy, as if it were being stuffed with damp rags. The trees at the edge of the clearing blurred. The portable lamp blurred, too—it wasn't bright and clean anymore but squishy, blobby; if she touched it, it would smear. Then darkness swooped over her brain, taking it away: *Taking away her mind.* "Daddy!" She tried to call, to clutch for him, but then the darkness obliterated her.

Afterward, they all had headaches. Dragging themselves back through

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the woods in the thin morning light was torture, compounded by an odd shame. They didn't touch each other. Leisha walked as far away from Richard as she could. It was a whole day before the throbbing left the base of her skull, or the nausea her stomach.

There had not even been any dreams.

"I want you to come with me tonight," Leisha said, for the tenth or twelfth time. "We both leave for college in just two days; this is the last chance. I really want you to meet Richard."

Alice lay on her stomach across her bed. Her hair, brown and lusterless, fell around her face. She wore an expensive yellow jumpsuit, silk by Ann Patterson, which rucked up in wrinkles around her knees.

"Why? What do you care if I meet Richard or not?"

"Because you're my sister," Leisha said. She knew better than to say "my twin." Nothing got Alice angry faster.

"I don't want to." The next moment Alice's face changed. "Oh, I'm sorry, Leisha—I didn't mean to sound so snotty. But . . . but I don't want to."

"It won't be all of them. Just Richard. And just for an hour or so. Then you can come back here and pack for Northwestern."

"I'm not going to Northwestern."

Leisha stared at her.

Alice said, "I'm pregnant."

Leisha sat on the bed. Alice rolled onto her back, brushed the hair out of her eyes, and laughed. Leisha's ears closed against the sound. "Look at you," Alice said. "You'd think it was *you* who was pregnant. But you never would be, would you, Leisha? Not until it was the proper time. Not you."

"How?" Leisha said. "We both had our caps put in . . . "

"I had the cap removed," Alice said.

"You wanted to get pregnant?"

"Damn flash I did. And there's not a thing Daddy can do about it. Except, of course, cut off all credit completely, but I don't think he'll do that, do you?" She laughed again. "Even to me?"

"But Alice . . . why? Not just to anger Daddy!"

"No," Alice said. "Although you would think of that, wouldn't you? Because I want something to love. Something of my *own*. Something that has nothing to do with this house."

Leisha thought of her and Alice running through the conservatory, years ago, her and Alice, darting in and out of the sunlight. "It hasn't been so bad growing up in this house."

"Leisha, you're stupid. I don't know how anyone so smart can be so stupid. Get out of my room! Get out!"

"But Alice . . . a *baby* . . . "

"Get out!" Alice shrieked. "Go to Harvard! Go be successful! Just get out!"

Leisha jerked off the bed. "Gladly! You're irrational, Alice! You don't

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think ahead, you don't plan a *baby* . . . " But she could never sustain anger. It dribbled away, leaving her mind empty. She looked at Alice, who suddenly put out her arms. Leisha went into them.

"You're the baby," Alice said wonderingly. "You *are*. You're so . . . I don't know what. You're a baby."

Leisha said nothing. Alice's arms felt warm, felt whole, felt like two children running in and out of sunlight. "I'll help you, Alice. If Daddy won't."

Alice abruptly pushed her away. "I don't need your help."

Alice stood. Leisha rubbed her empty arms, fingertips scraping across opposite elbows. Alice kicked the empty, open trunk in which she was supposed to pack for Northwestern, and then abruptly smiled, a smile that made Leisha look away. She braced herself for more abuse. But what Alice said, very softly, was, "Have a good time at Harvard."

V

She loved it.

From the first sight of Massachusetts Hall, older than the United States by a half century, Leisha felt something that had been missing in Chicago: Age. Roots. Tradition. She touched the bricks of Widener Library, the glass cases in the Peabody Museum, as if they were the grail. She had never been particularly sensitive to myth or drama; the anguish of Juliet seemed to her artificial, that of Willy Loman merely wasteful. Only King Arthur, struggling to create a better social order, had interested her. But now, walking under the huge autumn trees, she suddenly caught a glimpse of a force that could span generations, fortunes left to endow learning and achievement the benefactors would never see, individual effort spanning and shaping centuries to come. She stopped, and looked at the sky through the leaves, at the buildings solid with purpose. At such moments she thought of Camden, bending the will of an entire genetic research Institute to create her in the image he wanted.

Within a month, she had forgotten all such mega-musings.

The work load was incredible, even for her. The Sauley School had encouraged individual exploration at her own pace; Harvard knew what it wanted from her, at its pace. In the last twenty years, under the academic leadership of a man who in his youth had watched Japanese economic domination with dismay, Harvard had become the controversial leader of a return to hard-edged learning of facts, theories, applications, problem-solving, intellectual efficiency. The school accepted one out of every two hundred applications from around the world. The daughter of England's Prime Minister had flunked out her first year and been sent home.

Leisha had a single room in a new dormitory, the dorm because she had spent so many years isolated in Chicago and was hungry for people, the single so she would not disturb anyone else when she worked all

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night. Her second day a boy from down the hall sauntered in and perched on the edge of her desk.

"So you're Leisha Camden."

"Yes."

"Sixteen years old."

"Almost seventeen."

"Going to out-perform us all, I understand, without even trying."

Leisha's smile faded. The boy stared at her from under lowered downy brows. He was smiling, his eyes sharp. From Richard and Tony and the others Leisha had learned to recognize the anger that presented itself as contempt.

"Yes," Leisha said coolly, "I am."

"Are you sure? With your pretty little-girl hair and your mutant little-girl brain?"

"Oh, leave her alone, Hannaway," said another voice. A tall blond boy, so thin his ribs looked like ripples in brown sand, stood in jeans and bare feet, drying his wet hair. "Don't you ever get tired of walking around being an asshole?"

"Do you?" Hannaway said. He heaved himself off the desk and started toward the door. The blond moved out of his way. Leisha moved into it.

"The reason I'm going to do better than you," she said evenly, "is because I have certain advantages you don't. Including sleeplessness. And then after I 'out-perform' you, I'll be glad to help you study for your tests so that you can pass, too."

The blond, drying his ears, laughed. But Hannaway stood still, and into his eyes came an expression that made Leisha back away. He pushed past her and stormed out.

"Nice going, Camden," the blond said. "He deserved that."

"But I meant it," Leisha said. "I will help him study."

The blond lowered his towel and stared. "You did, didn't you? You meant it."

"Yes! Why does everybody keep questioning that?"

"Well," the boy said, "*I* don't. You can help me if I get into trouble." Suddenly he smiled. "But I won't."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm just as good at anything as you are, Leisha Camden."

She studied him. "You're not one of us. Not Sleepless."

"Don't have to be. I know what I can do. Do, be, create, trade."

She said, delighted, "You're a Yagaiist!"

"Of course." He held out his hand. "Stewart Sutter. How about a fish-burger in the Yard?"

"Great," Leisha said. They walked out together, talking excitedly. When people stared at her, she tried not to notice. She was here. At Harvard. With space ahead of her, time to learn, and with people like Stewart Sutter who accepted and challenged her.

All the hours he was awake.

* * *

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She became totally absorbed in her classwork. Roger Camden drove up once, walking the campus with her, listening, smiling. He was more at home than Leisha would have expected: He knew Stewart Sutter's father, Kate Addams' grandfather. They talked about Harvard, business, Harvard, the Yagaii Economics Institute, Harvard. "How's Alice?" Leisha asked once, but Camden said that he didn't know, she had moved out and did not want to see him. He made her an allowance through his attorney. While he said this, his face remained serene.

Leisha went to the Homecoming Ball with Stewart, who was also majoring in pre-law but was two years ahead of Leisha. She took a weekend trip to Paris with Kate Addams and two other girlfriends, taking the Concorde III. She had a fight with Stewart over whether the metaphor of superconductivity could apply to Yagaiism, a stupid fight they both knew was stupid but had anyway, and afterward they became lovers. After the fumbling sexual explorations with Richard, Stewart was deft, experienced, smiling faintly as he taught her how to have an orgasm both by herself and with him. Leisha was dazzled. "It's so *joyful*," she said, and Stewart looked at her with a tenderness she knew was part disturbance but didn't know why.

At mid-semester she had the highest grades in the freshman class. She got every answer right on every single question on her mid-terms. She and Stewart went out for a beer to celebrate, and when they came back Leisha's room had been destroyed. The computer was smashed, the data banks wiped, hardcopies and books smoldering in a metal wastebasket. Her clothes were ripped to pieces, her desk and bureau hacked apart. The only thing untouched, pristine, was the bed.

Stewart said, "There's no way this could have been done in silence. Everyone on the floor—hell, on the floor *below*—had to know. Someone will talk to the police." No one did. Leisha sat on the edge of the bed, dazed, and looked at the remnants of her Homecoming gown. The next day Dave Hannaway gave her a long, wide smile.

Camden flew east again, taut with rage. He rented her an apartment in Cambridge with E-lock security and a bodyguard named Toshio. After he left, Leisha fired the bodyguard but kept the apartment. It gave her and Stewart more privacy, which they used to endlessly discuss the situation. It was Leisha who argued that it was an aberration, an immaturity.

"There have always been haters, Stewart. Hate Jews, hate Blacks, hate immigrants, hate Yagaiists who have more initiative and dignity than you do. I'm just the latest object of hatred. It's not new, it's not remarkable. It doesn't mean any basic kind of schism between the Sleepless and Sleepers."

Stewart sat up in bed and reached for the sandwiches on the night stand. "Doesn't it? Leisha, you're a different kind of person entirely. More evolutionarily fit, not only to survive but to prevail. Those other 'objects of hatred' you cite except yagaiists—they were all powerless in their societies. They occupied *inferior* positions. You, on the other hand—all

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three Sleepless in Harvard Law are on the *Law Review*. All of them. Kevin Baker, your oldest, has already founded a successful bio-interface software firm and is making money, a lot of it. Every Sleepless is making superb grades, none have psychological problems, all are healthy—and most of you aren't even adults yet. How much hatred do you think you're going to encounter once you hit the big-stakes world of finance and business and scarce endowed chairs and national politics?"

"Give me a sandwich," Leisha said. "Here's my evidence you're wrong: You yourself. Kenzo Yagai. Kate Addams. Professor Lane. My father. Every Sleeper who inhabits the world of fair trade, mutually beneficial contracts. And that's most of you, or at least most of you who are worth considering. You believe that competition among the most capable leads to the most beneficial trades for everyone, strong and weak. Sleepless are making real and concrete contributions to society, in a lot of fields. That has to outweigh the discomfort we cause. We're *valuable* to you. You know that."

Stewart brushed crumbs off the sheets. "Yes. I do. Yagaiists do."

"Yagaiists run the business and financial and academic worlds. Or they will. In a meritocracy, they *should*. You underestimate the majority of people, Stew. Ethics aren't confined to the ones out front."

"I hope you're right," Steward said. "Because, you know, I'm in love with you."

Leisha put down her sandwich.

"Joy," Stewart mumbled into her breasts, "you are joy."

When Leisha went home for Thanksgiving, she told Richard about Stewart. He listened tight-lipped.

"A Sleeper."

"A *person*," Leisha said. "A good, intelligent, achieving person!"

"Do you know what your good intelligent achieving Sleepers have done, Leisha? Jeanine has been barred from Olympic skating. 'Genetic alteration, analogous to steroid abuse to create an unsportsmanlike advantage.' Chris Devereaux's left Stanford. They trashed his laboratory, destroyed two years' work in memory formation proteins. Kevin Baker's software company is fighting a nasty advertising campaign, all underground of course, about kids using software designed by 'non-human minds.' Corruption, mental slavery, satanic influences: the whole bag of witch-hunt tricks. Wake up, Leisha!"

They both heard his words. Moments dragged by. Richard stood like a boxer, forward on the balls of his feet, teeth clenched. Finally he said, very quietly, "Do you love him?"

"Yes," Leisha said. "I'm sorry."

"Your choice," Richard said coldly. "What do you do while he's asleep? Watch?"

"You make it sound like a perversion!"

Richard said nothing. Leisha drew a deep breath. She spoke rapidly but calmly, a controlled rush: "While Stewart is asleep I work. The same as you do. Richard—don't do this. I didn't mean to hurt you. And I don't

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want to lose the group. I believe the Sleepers are the same species as we are—are you going to punish me for that? Are you going to *add* to the hatred? Are you going to tell me that I can't belong to a wider world that includes all honest, worthwhile people whether they sleep or not? Are you going to tell me that the most important division is by genetics and not by economic spirituality? Are you going to force me into an artificial choice, 'us' or 'them'?"

Richard picked up a bracelet. Leisha recognized it: She had given it to him in the summer. His voice was quiet. "No. It's not a choice." He played with the gold links a minute, then looked up at her. "Not yet."

By spring break, Camden walked more slowly. He took medicine for his blood pressure, his heart. He and Susan, he told Leisha, were getting a divorce. "She changed, Leisha, after I married her. You saw that. She was independent and productive and happy, and then after a few years she stopped all that and became a shrew. A whining shrew." He shook his head in genuine bewilderment. "You saw the change."

Leisha had. A memory came to her: Susan leading her and Alice in "games" that were actually controlled cerebral-performance tests, Susan's braids dancing around her sparkling eyes. Alice had loved Susan, then, as much as Leisha had.

"Dad, I want Alice's address."

"I told you up at Harvard, I don't have it," Camden said. He shifted in his chair, the impatient gesture of a body that never expected to wear out. In January Kenzo Yagai had died of pancreatic cancer; Camden had taken the news hard. "I make her allowance through an attorney. By her choice."

"Then I want the address of the attorney."

The attorney, however, refused to tell Leisha where Alice was. "She doesn't want to be found, Ms. Camden. She wanted a complete break."

"Not from me," Leisha said.

"Yes," the attorney said, and something flickered behind his eyes, something she had last seen in Dave Hannaway's face.

She flew to Austin before returning to Boston, making her a day late for classes. Kevin Baker saw her instantly, canceling a meeting with IBM. She told him what she needed, and he set his best data-net people on it, without telling them why. Within two hours she had Alice's address from the attorney's electronic files. It was the first time, she realized, that she had ever turned to one of the Sleepless for help, and it had been given instantly. Without trade.

Alice was in Pennsylvania. The next weekend Leisha rented a hovercar and driver—she had learned to drive, but only groundcars as yet—and went to High Ridge, in the Appalachian Mountains.

It was an isolated hamlet, twenty-five miles from the nearest hospital. Alice lived with a man named Ed, a silent carpenter twenty years older than she, in a cabin in the woods. The cabin had water and electricity but no news net. In the early spring light the earth was raw and bare,

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slashed with icy gullies. Alice and Ed apparently worked at nothing. Alice was eight months pregnant.

"I didn't want you here," she said to Leisha. "So why are you?"

"Because you're my sister."

"God, look at you. Is that what they're wearing at Harvard? Boots like that? When did you become fashionable, Leisha? You were always too busy being intellectual to care."

"What's this all about, Alice? Why here? What are you doing?"

"Living," Alice said. "Away from dear Daddy, away from Chicago, away from drunken broken Susan—did you know she drinks? Just like Mom. He does that to people. But not to me. I got out. I wonder if you ever will."

"Got out? To *this*?"

"I'm happy," Alice said angrily. "Isn't that what it's supposed to be about? Isn't that the aim of your great Kenzo Yagai—happiness through individual effort?"

Leisha thought of saying that Alice was making no efforts that she could see. She didn't say it. A chicken ran through the yard of the cabin. Behind, the Great Smoky Mountains rose in layers of blue haze. Leisha thought what this place must have been like in winter: cut off from the world where people strived towards goals, learned, changed.

"I'm glad you're happy, Alice."

"Are you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm glad, too," Alice said, almost defiantly. The next moment she abruptly hugged Leisha, fiercely, the huge hard mound of her belly crushed between them. Alice's hair smelled sweet, like fresh grass in sunlight.

"I'll come see you again, Alice."

"Don't," Alice said.

VI

SLEEPLESS MUTIE BEGS FOR REVERSAL OF GENE TAMPERING, screamed the headline in the Food Mart. "PLEASE LET ME SLEEP LIKE REAL PEOPLE!" CHILD PLEADS.

Leisha typed in her credit number and pressed the news kiosk for a print-out, although ordinarily she ignored the electronic tabloids. The headline went on circling the kiosk. A Food Mart employee stopped stacking boxes on shelves and watched her. Bruce, Leisha's bodyguard, watched the employee.

She was twenty-two, in her final year at Harvard Law, editor of the *Law Review*, ranked first in her class. The next three were Jonathan Cocchiara, Len Carter, and Martha Wentz. All Sleepless.

In her apartment she skimmed the print-out. Then she accessed the Groupnet run from Austin. The files had more news stories about the

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child, with comments from other Sleepless, but before she could call them up Kevin Baker came on-line himself, on voice.

"Leisha. I'm glad you called. I was going to call you."

"What's the situation with this Stella Bevington, Kev? Has anybody checked it out?"

"Randy Davies. He's from Chicago but I don't think you've met him, he's still in high school. He's in Park Ridge, Stella's in Skokie. Her parents wouldn't talk to him—were pretty abusive, in fact—but he got to see Stella face-to-face anyway. It doesn't look like an abuse case, just the usual stupidity: parents wanted a genius child, scrimped and saved, and now they can't handle that she *is* one. They scream at her to sleep, get emotionally abusive when she contradicts them, but so far no violence."

"Is the emotional abuse actionable?"

"I don't think we want to move on it yet. Two of us will keep in close touch with Stella—she does have a modem, and she hasn't told her parents about the net—and Randy will drive out weekly."

Leisha bit her lip. "A tabloid shitpiece said she's seven years old."

"Yes."

"Maybe she shouldn't be left there. I'm an Illinois resident, I can file an abuse grievance from here if Candy's got too much in her briefcase. . . ."

Seven years old.

"No. Let it sit a while. Stella will probably be all right. You know that."

She did. Nearly all of the Sleepless stayed "all right," no matter how much opposition came from the stupid segment of society. And it was only the stupid segment, Leisha argued—a small if vocal minority. Most people could, and would, adjust to the growing presence of the Sleepless, when it became clear that that presence included not only growing power but growing benefits to the country as a whole.

Kevin Baker, now twenty-six, had made a fortune in micro-chips so revolutionary that Artificial Intelligence, once a debated dream, was yearly closer to reality. Carolyn Rizzolo had won the Pulitzer Prize in drama for her play *Morning Light*. She was twenty-four. Jeremy Robinson had done significant work in superconductivity applications while still a graduate student at Stanford. William Thaine, *Law Review* editor when Leisha first came to Harvard, was now in private practice. He had never lost a case. He was twenty-six, and the cases were becoming important. His clients valued his ability more than his age.

But not everyone reacted that way.

Kevin Baker and Richard Keller had started the datanet that bound the Sleepless into a tight group, constantly aware of each other's personal fights. Leisha Camden financed the legal battles, the educational costs of Sleepless whose parents were unable to meet them, the support of children in emotionally bad situations. Rhonda Lavelier got herself licensed as a foster mother in California, and whenever possible the Group maneuvered to have small Sleepless who were removed from their homes

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assigned to Rhonda. The Group now had three ABA lawyers; within the next year they would gain four more, licensed to practice in five different states.

The one time they had not been able to remove an abused Sleepless child legally, they kidnapped him.

Timmy DeMarzo, four years old. Leisha had been opposed to the action. She had argued the case morally and pragmatically—to her they were the same thing—thus: If they believed in their society, in its fundamental laws and in their ability to belong to it as free-trading productive individuals, they must remain bound by the society's contractual laws. The Sleepless were, for the most part, Yagaiists. They should already know this. And if the FBI caught them, the courts and press would crucify them.

They were not caught.

Timmy DeMarzo—not even old enough to call for help on the datanet, they had learned of the situation through the automatic police-record scan Kevin maintained through his company—was stolen from his own backyard in Wichita. He had lived the last year in an isolated trailer in North Dakota; no place was too isolated for a modem. He was cared for by a legally irreproachable foster mother who had lived there all her life. The foster mother was second cousin to a Sleepless, a broad cheerful woman with a much better brain than her appearance indicated. She was a Yagaiist. No record of the child's existence appeared in any data bank: not the IRS, not any school's, not even the local grocery store's computerized check-out slips. Food specifically for the child was shipped in monthly on a truck owned by a Sleepless in State College, Pennsylvania. Ten of the Group knew about the kidnapping, out of the total 3,428 born in the United States. Of that total, 2,691 were part of the Group via the net. Another 701 were as yet too young to use a modem. Only 36 Sleepless, for whatever reason, were not part of the Group.

The kidnapping had been arranged by Tony Indivino.

"It's Tony I wanted to talk to you about," Kevin said to Leisha. "He's started again. This time he means it. He's buying land."

She folded the tabloid very small and laid it carefully on the table. "Where?"

"Allegheny Mountains. In southern New York State. A lot of land. He's putting in the roads now. In the spring, the first buildings."

"Jennifer Sharifi still financing it?" She was the American-born daughter of an Arab prince who had wanted a Sleepless child. The prince was dead and Jennifer, dark-eyed and multilingual, was richer than Leisha would one day be.

"Yes. He's starting to get a following, Leisha."

"I know."

"Call him."

"I will. Keep me informed about Stella."

She worked until midnight at the *Law Review,* then until four A.M. preparing her classes. From four to five she handled legal matters for

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the Group. At five A.M. she called Tony, still in Chicago. He had finished high school, done one semester at Northwestern, and at Christmas vacation he had finally exploded at his mother for forcing him to live as a Sleeper. The explosion, it seemed to Leisha, had never ended.

"Tony? Leisha."

"The answer is yes, yes, no, and go to hell."

Leisha gritted her teeth. "Fine. Now tell me the questions."

"Are you really serious about the Sleepless withdrawing into their own self-sufficient society? Is Jennifer Sharifi willing to finance a project the size of building a small city? Don't you think that's a cheat of all that can be accomplished by patient integration of the Group into the mainstream? And what about the contradictions of living in an armed restricted city and still trading with the Outside?"

"I would never tell *you* to go to hell."

"Hooray for you," Tony said. After a moment he added, "I'm sorry. That sounds like one of *them*."

"It's wrong for us, Tony."

"Thanks for not saying I couldn't pull it off."

She wondered if he could. "We're not a separate species, Tony."

"Tell that to the Sleepers."

"You exaggerate. There are haters out there, there are *always* haters, but to give up . . . "

"We're not giving up. Whatever we create can be freely traded: software, hardware, novels, information, theories, legal counsel. We can travel in and out. But we'll have a safe place to return *to*. Without the leeches who think we owe them blood because we're better than they are."

"It isn't a matter of owing."

"Really?" Tony said. "Let's have this out, Leisha. All the way. You're a Yagaiist—what do you believe in?"

"Tony . . . "

"*Do it*," Tony said, and in his voice she heard the fourteen-year-old Richard had introduced her to. Simultaneously, she saw her father's face: not as he was now, since the by-pass, but as he had been when she was a little girl, holding her on his lap to explain that she was special.

"I believe in voluntary trade that is mutually beneficial. That spiritual dignity comes from supporting one's life through one's own efforts, and trading the results of those efforts in mutual cooperation throughout the society. That the symbol of this is the contract. And that we need each other for the fullest, most beneficial trade."

"Fine," Tony bit off. "Now what about the beggars in Spain?"

"The what?"

"You walk down a street in a poor country like Spain and you see a beggar. Do you give him a dollar?"

"Probably."

"Why? He's trading nothing with you. He has nothing to trade."

"I know. Out of kindness. Compassion."

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"You see six beggars. Do you give them all a dollar?"

"Probably," Leisha said.

"You would. You see a hundred beggars and you haven't got Leisha Camden's money—do you give them each a dollar?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Leisha reached for patience. Few people could make her want to cut off a comm link; Tony was one of them. "Too draining on my own resources. My life has first claim on the resources I earn."

"All right. Now consider this. At Biotech Institute—where you and I began, dear pseudo-sister—Dr. Melling has just yesterday—"

"*Who?*"

"Dr. Susan Melling. Oh, God, I completely forgot—she used to be married to your father!"

"I lost track of her," Leisha said. "I didn't realize she'd gone back to research. Alice once said . . . never mind. What's going on at Biotech?"

"Two crucial items, just released. Carla Dutcher has had first-month fetal genetic analysis. Sleeplessness is a dominant gene. The next generation of the Group won't sleep either."

"We all knew that," Leisha said. Carla Dutcher was the world's first pregnant Sleepless. Her husband was a Sleeper. "The whole world expected that."

"But the press will have a windfall with it anyway. Just watch. Muties Breed! New Race Set To Dominate Next Generation of Children!"

Leisha didn't deny it. "And the second item?"

"It's sad, Leisha. We've just had our first death."

Her stomach tightened. "Who?"

"Bernie Kuhn. Seattle." She didn't know him. "A car accident. It looks pretty straightforward—he lost control on a steep curve when his brakes failed. He had only been driving a few months. He was seventeen. But the significance here is that his parents have donated his brain and body to Biotech, in conjunction with the pathology department at the Chicago Medical School. They're going to take him apart to get the first good look at what prolonged sleeplessness does to the body and brain."

"They should," Leisha said. "That poor kid. But what are you so afraid they'll find?"

"I don't know. I'm not a doctor. But whatever it is, if the haters can use it against us, they will."

"You're paranoid, Tony."

"Impossible. The Sleepless have personalities calmer and more reality-oriented than the norm. Don't you read the literature?"

"Tony—"

"What if you walk down that street in Spain and a hundred beggars each want a dollar and you say no and they have nothing to trade you but they're so rotten with anger about what you have that they knock you down and grab it and then beat you out of sheer envy and despair?"

Leisha didn't answer.

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"Are you going to say that's not a human scenario, Leisha? That it never happens?"

"It happens," Leisha said evenly. "But not all that often."

"Bullshit. Read more history. Read more *newspapers*. But the point is: What do you owe the beggars then? What does a good Yagaiist who believes in mutually beneficial contracts do with people who have nothing to trade and can only take?"

"You're not—"

"*What*, Leisha? In the most objective terms you can manage, what do we owe the grasping and non-productive needy?"

"What I said originally. Kindness. Compassion."

"Even if they don't trade it back? Why?"

"Because . . . " She stopped.

"Why? Why do law-abiding and productive human beings owe anything to those who neither produce very much nor abide by laws? What philosophical or economic or spiritual justification is there for owing them anything? Be as honest as I know you are."

Leisha put her head between her knees. The question gaped beneath her, but she didn't try to evade it. "I don't know. I just know we do."

"*Why?*"

She didn't answer. After a moment, Tony did. The intellectual challenge was gone from his voice. He said, almost tenderly, "Come down in the spring and see the site for Sanctuary. The buildings will be going up then."

"No," Leisha said.

"I'd like you to."

"No. Armed retreat is not the way."

Tony said, "The beggars are getting nastier, Leisha. As the Sleepless grow richer. And I don't mean in money."

"Tony—" she said, and stopped. She couldn't think what to say.

"Don't walk down too many streets armed with just the memory of Kenzo Yagai."

In March, a bitterly cold March of winds whipping down the Charles River, Richard Keller came to Cambridge. Leisha had not seen him for four years. He didn't send her word on the Groupnet that he was coming. She hurried up the walk to her townhouse, muffled to the eyes in a red wool scarf against the snowy cold, and he stood there blocking the doorway. Behind Leisha, her bodyguard tensed.

"Richard! Bruce, it's all right, this is an old friend."

"Hello, Leisha."

He was heavier, sturdier-looking, with a breadth of shoulder she didn't recognize. But the face was Richard's, older but unchanged: dark low brows, unruly dark hair. He had grown a beard.

"You look beautiful," he said.

She handed him a cup of coffee. "Are you here on business?" From the Groupnet she knew that he had finished his Master's and had done

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outstanding work in marine biology in the Caribbean, but had left that a year ago and disappeared from the net.

"No. Pleasure." He smiled suddenly, the old smile that opened up his dark face. "I almost forgot about that for a long time. Contentment, yes, we're all good at the contentment that comes from sustained work, but pleasure? Whim? Caprice? When was the last time you did something silly, Leisha?"

She smiled. "I ate cotton candy in the shower."

"Really? Why?"

"To see if it would dissolve in gooey pink patterns."

"Did it?"

"Yes. Lovely ones."

"And that was your last silly thing? When was it?"

"Last summer," Leisha said, and laughed.

"Well, mine is sooner than that. It's now. I'm in Boston for no other reason than the spontaneous pleasure of seeing you."

Leisha stopped laughing. "That's an intense tone for a spontaneous pleasure, Richard."

"Yup," he said, intensely. She laughed again. He didn't.

"I've been in India, Leisha. And China and Africa. Thinking, mostly. Watching. First I traveled like a Sleeper, attracting no attention. Then I set out to meet the Sleepless in India and China. There are a few, you know, whose parents were willing to come here for the operation. They pretty much are accepted and left alone. I tried to figure out why desperately poor countries—by our standards anyway, over there Y-energy is mostly available only in big cities—don't have any trouble accepting the superiority of Sleepless, whereas Americans, with more prosperity than any time in history, build in resentment more and more."

Leisha said, "Did you figure it out?"

"No. But I figured out something else, watching all those communes and villages and kampongs. We are too individualistic."

Disappointment swept Leisha. She saw her father's face: *Excellence is what counts, Leisha. Excellence supported by individual effort. . . .* She reached for Richard's cup. "More coffee?"

He caught her wrist and looked up into her face. "Don't misunderstand me, Leisha. I'm not talking about work. We are too much individuals in the rest of our lives. Too emotionally rational. Too much alone. Isolation kills more than the free flow of ideas. It kills joy."

He didn't let go of her wrist. She looked down into his eyes, into depths she hadn't seen before: It was the feeling of looking into a mine shaft, both giddy and frightening, knowing that at the bottom might be gold or darkness. Or both.

Richard said softly, "Stewart?"

"Over long ago. An undergraduate thing." Her voice didn't sound like her own.

"Kevin?"

"No, never—we're just friends."

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"I wasn't sure. Anyone?"

"No."

He let go of her wrist. Leisha peered at him timidly. He suddenly laughed. "Joy, Leisha." An echo sounded in her mind, but she couldn't place it and then it was gone and she laughed too, a laugh airy and frothy as pink cotton candy in summer.

"Come home, Leisha. He's had another heart attack."

Susan Melling's voice on the phone was tired. Leisha said, "How bad?"

"The doctors aren't sure. Or say they're not sure. He wants to see you. Can you leave your studies?"

It was May, the last push toward her finals. The *Law Review* proofs were behind schedule. Richard had started a new business, marine consulting to Boston fishermen plagued with sudden inexplicable shifts in ocean currents, and was working twenty hours a day. "I'll come," Leisha said.

Chicago was colder than Boston. The trees were half-budded. On Lake Michigan, filling the huge east windows of her father's house, whitecaps tossed up cold spray. Leisha saw that Susan was living in the house: her brushes on Camden's dresser, her journals on the credenza in the foyer.

"Leisha," Camden said. He looked old. Gray skin, sunken cheeks, the fretful and bewildered look of men who accepted potency like air, indivisible from their lives. In the corner of the room, on a small eighteenth-century slipper chair, sat a short, stocky woman with brown braids.

"*Alice.*"

"Hello, Leisha."

"*Alice.* I've looked for you. . . ." The wrong thing to say. Leisha had looked, but not very hard, deterred by the knowledge that Alice had not wanted to be found. "How are you?"

"I'm fine," Alice said. She seemed remote, gentle, unlike the angry Alice of six years ago in the raw Pennsylvania hills. Camden moved painfully on the bed. He looked at Leisha with eyes which, she saw, were undimmed in their blue brightness.

"I asked Alice to come. And Susan. Susan came a while ago. I'm dying, Leisha."

No one contradicted him. Leisha, knowing his respect for facts, remained silent. Love hurt her chest.

"John Jaworski has my will. None of you can break it. But I wanted to tell you myself what's in it. The last few years I've been selling, liquidating. Most of my holdings are accessible now. I've left a tenth to Alice, a tenth to Susan, a tenth to Elizabeth, and the rest to you, Leisha, because you're the only one with the individual ability to use the money to its full potential for achievement."

Leisha looked wildly at Alice, who gazed back with her strange remote calm. "Elizabeth? My . . . mother? Is alive?"

"Yes," Camden said.

"You told me she was dead! Years and years ago!"

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"Yes. I thought it was better for you that way. She didn't like what you were, was jealous of what you could become. And she had nothing to give you. She would only have caused you emotional harm."

Beggars in Spain . . .

"That was wrong, Dad. You were *wrong*. She's my *mother* . . . " She couldn't finish the sentence.

Camden didn't flinch. "I don't think I was. But you're an adult now. You can see her if you wish."

He went on looking at her from his bright, sunken eyes, while around Leisha the air heaved and snapped. Her father had lied to her. Susan watched her closely, a small smile on her lips. Was she glad to see Camden fall in his daughter's estimation? Had she all along been that jealous of their relationship, of Leisha . . .

She was thinking like Tony.

The thought steadied her a little. But she went on staring at Camden, who went on staring implacably back, unbudged, a man positive even on his death bed that he was right.

Alice's hand was on her elbow, Alice's voice so soft that no one but Leisha could hear. "He's done now, Leisha. And after a while you'll be all right."

Alice had left her son in California with her husband of two years, Beck Watrous, a building contractor she had met while waitressing in a resort on the Artificial Islands. Beck had adopted Jordan, Alice's son.

"Before Beck there was a real bad time," Alice said in her remote voice. "You know, when I was carrying Jordan I actually used to dream that he would be Sleepless? Like you. Every night I'd dream that, and every morning I'd wake up and have morning sickness with a baby that was only going to be a stupid nothing like me. I stayed with Ed—in Pennsylvania, remember? You came to see me there once—for two more years. When he beat me, I was glad. I wished Daddy could see. At least Ed was touching me."

Leisha made a sound in her throat.

"I finally left because I was afraid for Jordan. I went to California, did nothing but eat for a year. I got up to 190 pounds." Alice was, Leisha estimated, five-foot-four. "Then I came home to see Mother."

"You didn't tell me," Leisha said. "You knew she was alive and you didn't tell me."

"She's in a drying-out tank half the time," Alice said, with brutal simplicity. "She wouldn't see you if you wanted to. But she saw me, and she fell slobbering all over me as her 'real' daughter, and she threw up on my dress. And I backed away from her and looked at the dress and knew it *should* be thrown up on, it was so ugly. Deliberately ugly. She started screaming how Dad had ruined her life, ruined mine, all for *you*. And do you know what I did?"

"What?" Leisha said. Her voice was shaky.

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"I flew home, burned all my clothes, got a job, started college, lost fifty pounds, and put Jordan in play therapy."

The sisters sat silent. Beyond the window the lake was dark, unlit by moon or stars. It was Leisha who suddenly shook, and Alice who patted her shoulder.

"Tell me . . . " Leisha couldn't think what she wanted to be told, except that she wanted to hear Alice's voice in the gloom, Alice's voice as it was now, gentle and remote, without damage any more from the damaging fact of Leisha's existence. Her very existence as damage. " . . . tell me about Jordan. He's five now? What's he like?"

Alice turned her head to look levelly into Leisha's eyes. "He's a happy, ordinary little boy. Completely ordinary."

Camden died a week later. After the funeral, Leisha tried to see her mother at the Brookfield Drug and Alcohol Abuse Center. Elizabeth Camden, she was told, saw no one except her only child, Alice Camden Watrous.

Susan Melling, dressed in black, drove Leisha to the airport. Susan talked deftly, determinedly, about Leisha's studies, about Harvard, about the *Review*. Leisha answered in monosyllables but Susan persisted, asking questions, quietly insisting on answers: When would Leisha take her bar exams? Where was she interviewing for jobs? Gradually Leisha began to lose the numbness she had felt since her father's casket was lowered into the ground. She realized that Susan's persistent questioning was a kindness.

"He sacrificed a lot of people," Leisha said suddenly.

"Not me," Susan said. She pulled the car into the airport parking lot. "Only for a while there, when I gave up my work to do his. Roger didn't respect sacrifice much."

"Was he wrong?" Leisha said. The question came out with a kind of desperation she hadn't intended.

Susan smiled sadly. "No. He wasn't wrong. I should never have left my research. It took me a long time to come back to myself after that."

He does that to people, Leisha heard inside her head. Susan? Or Alice? She couldn't, for once, remember clearly. She saw her father in the old conservatory, potting and repotting the dramatic exotic flowers he had loved.

She was tired. It was muscle fatigue from stress, she knew; twenty minutes of rest would restore her. Her eyes burned from unaccustomed tears. She leaned her head back against the car seat and closed them.

Susan pulled the car into the airport parking lot and turned off the ignition. "There's something I want to tell you, Leisha."

Leisha opened her eyes. "About the will?"

Susan smiled tightly. "No. You really don't have any problems with how he divided the estate, do you? It seems to you reasonable. But that's not it. The research team from Biotech and Chicago Medical has finished its analysis of Bernie Kuhn's brain."

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Leisha turned to face Susan. She was startled by the complexity of Susan's expression. Determination, and satisfaction, and anger, and something else Leisha could not name.

Susan said, "We're going to publish next week, in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Security has been unbelievably restricted—no leaks to the popular press. But I want to tell you now, myself, what we found. So you'll be prepared."

"Go on," Leisha said. Her chest felt tight.

"Do you remember when you and the other Sleepless kids took interleukin-1 to see what sleep was like? When you were sixteen?"

"How did you know about that?"

"You kids were watched a lot more closely than you think. Remember the headache you got?"

"Yes." She and Richard and Tony and Carol and Jeanine . . . after her rejection by the Olympic Committee, Jeanine had never skated again. She was a kindergarten teacher in Butte, Montana.

"Interleukin-1 is what I want to talk about. At least partly. It's one of a whole group of substances that boost the immune system. They stimulate the production of antibodies, the activity of white blood cells, and a host of other immunoenhancements. Normal people have surges of IL-1 released during the slow-wave phases of sleep. That means that they—we—are getting boosts to the immune system during sleep. One of the questions we researchers asked ourselves twenty-eight years ago was: Will Sleepless kids who don't get those surges of IL-1 get sick more often?"

"I've never been sick," Leisha said.

"Yes, you have. Chicken pox and three minor colds by the end of your fourth year," Susan said precisely. "But in general you were all a very healthy lot. So we researchers were left with the alternate theory of sleep-driven immunoenhancement: That the burst of immune activity existed as a counterpart to a greater vulnerability of the body in sleep to disease, probably in some way connected to the fluctuations in body temperature during REM sleep. In other words, sleep *caused* the immune vulnerability that endogenous pyrogens like IL-1 counteract. Sleep was the problem, immune system enhancements were the solution. Without sleep, there would be no problem. Are you following this?"

"Yes."

"Of course you are. Stupid question." Susan brushed her hair off her face. It was going gray at the temples. There was a tiny brown age spot beneath her right ear.

"Over the years we collected thousands—maybe hundreds of thousands—of Single Photon Emission Tomography scans of you and the other kids' brains, plus endless EEG's, samples of cerebrospinal fluid, and all the rest of it. But we couldn't really see inside your brains, really know what's going on in there. Until Bernie Kuhn hit that embankment."

"Susan," Leisha said, "give it to me straight. Without more build-up."

"You're not going to age."

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"What?"

"Oh, cosmetically, yes. Gray hair, wrinkles, sags. But the absence of sleep peptides and all the rest of it affects the immune and tissue-restoration systems in ways we don't understand. Bernie Kuhn had a perfect liver. Perfect lungs, perfect heart, perfect lymph nodes, perfect pancreas, perfect medulla oblongata. Not just healthy, or young—*perfect*. There's a tissue regeneration enhancement that clearly derives from the operation of the immune system but is radically different from anything we ever suspected. Organs show no wear and tear—not even the minimal amount expected in a seventeen-year-old. They just repair themselves, perfectly, on and on . . . and on."

"For how long?" Leisha whispered.

"Who the hell knows? Bernie Kuhn was young—maybe there's some compensatory mechanism that cuts in at some point and you'll all just collapse, like an entire fucking gallery of Dorian Grays. But I don't think so. Neither do I think it can go on forever; no tissue regeneration can do that. But a long, long time."

Leisha stared at the blurred reflections in the car windshield. She saw her father's face against the blue satin of his casket, banked with white roses. His heart, unregenerated, had given out.

Susan said, "The future is all speculative at this point. We know that the peptide structures that build up the pressure to sleep in normal people resemble the components of bacterial cell walls. Maybe there's a connection between sleep and pathogen receptivity. We don't know. But ignorance never stopped the tabloids. I wanted to prepare you because you're going to get called supermen, *homo perfectus*, who-all-knows what. Immortal."

The two women sat in silence. Finally Leisha said, "I'm going to tell the others. On our datanet. Don't worry about the security. Kevin Baker designed Groupnet; nobody knows anything we don't want them to."

"You're that well organized already?"

"Yes."

Susan's mouth worked. She looked away from Leisha. "We better go in. You'll miss your flight."

"Susan . . "

"What?"

"Thank you."

"You're welcome," Susan said, and in her voice Leisha heard the thing she had seen before in Susan's expression and not been able to name: It was longing.

Tissue regeneration. A long, long time, sang the blood in Leisha's ears on the flight to Boston. *Tissue regeneration.* And, eventually: *Immortal.* No, not that, she told herself severely. Not that. The blood didn't listen.

"You sure smile a lot," said the man next to her in first class, a business traveler who had not recognized Leisha. "You coming from a big party in Chicago?"

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"No. From a funeral."

The man looked shocked, then disgusted. Leisha looked out the window at the ground far below. Rivers like micro-circuits, fields like neat index cards. And on the horizon, fluffy white clouds like masses of exotic flowers, blooms in a conservatory filled with light.

The letter was no thicker than any hard-copy mail, but hard-copy mail addressed by hand to either of them was so rare that Richard was nervous. "It might be explosive." Leisha looked at the letter on their hall credenza. MS. LIESHA CAMDEN. Block letters, misspelled.

"It looks like a child's writing," she said.

Richard stood with head lowered, legs braced apart. But his expression was only weary. "Perhaps deliberately like a child's. You'd be more open to a child's writing, they might have figured."

" 'They'? Richard, are we getting that paranoid?"

He didn't flinch from the question. "Yes. For the time being."

A week earlier the *New England Journal of Medicine* had published Susan's careful, sober article. An hour later the broadcast and datanet news had exploded in speculation, drama, outrage, and fear. Leisha and Richard, along with all the Sleepless on the Groupnet, had tracked and charted each of four components, looking for a dominant reaction: speculation ("The Sleepless may live for centuries, and this might lead to the following events . . . "); drama ("If a Sleepless marries only Sleepers, he may have lifetime enough for a dozen brides—and several dozen children, a bewildering blended family . ."); outrage ("Tampering with the law of nature has only brought among us unnatural so-called people who will live with the unfair advantage of time: time to accumulate more kin, more power, more property than the rest of us could ever know. . . ."); and fear ("How soon before the Super-race takes over?")

"They're all fear, of one kind or another," Carolyn Rizzolo finally said, and the Groupnet stopped their differentiated tracking.

Leisha was taking the final exams of her last year of law school. Each day comments followed her to the campus, along the corridors and in the classroom; each day she forgot them in the grueling exam sessions, all students reduced to the same status of petitioner to the great university. Afterward, temporarily drained, she walked silently back home to Richard and the Groupnet, aware of the looks of people on the street, aware of her bodyguard Bruce striding between her and them.

"It will calm down," Leisha said. Richard didn't answer.

The town of Salt Springs, Texas, passed a local ordinance that no Sleepless could obtain a liquor license, on the grounds that civil rights statutes were built on the "all men were created equal" clause of the Constitution, and Sleepless clearly were not covered. There were no Sleepless within a hundred miles of Salt Springs and no one had applied for a new liquor license there for the past ten years, but the story was picked up by United Press and by Datanet News, and within twenty-four

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hours heated editorials appeared, on both sides of the issue, across the nation.

More local ordinances appeared. In Pollux, Pennsylvania, the Sleepless could be denied apartment rental on the grounds that their prolonged wakefulness would increase both wear-and-tear on the landlord's property and utility bills. In Cranston Estates, California, Sleepless were barred from operating twenty-four-hour businesses: "unfair competition." Iroquois County, New York, barred them from serving on county juries, arguing that a jury containing Sleepless, with their skewed idea of time, did not constitute "a jury of one's peers."

"All those statutes will be thrown out in superior courts," Leisha said. "But God! The waste of money and docket time to do it!" A part of her mind noticed that her tone as she said this was Roger Camden's.

The state of Georgia, in which some sex acts between consenting adults were still a crime, made sex between a Sleepless and a Sleeper a third-degree felony, classing it with bestiality.

Kevin Baker had designed software that scanned the newsnets at high speed, flagged all stories involving discrimination or attacks on Sleepless, and categorized them by type. The files were available on Groupnet. Leisha read through them, then called Kevin. "Can't you create a parallel program to flag defenses of us? We're getting a skewed picture."

"You're right," Kevin said, a little startled. "I didn't think of it."

"Think of it," Leisha said, grimly. Richard, watching her, said nothing.

She was most upset by the stories about Sleepless children. Shunning at school, verbal abuse by siblings, attacks by neighborhood bullies, confused resentment from parents who had wanted an exceptional child but had not bargained on one who might live centuries. The school board of Cold River, Iowa, voted to bar Sleepless children from conventional classrooms because their rapid learning "created feelings of inadequacy in others, interfering with their education." The board made funds available for Sleepless to have tutors at home. There were no volunteers among the teaching staff. Leisha started spending as much time on Groupnet with the kids, talking to them all night long, as she did studying for her bar exams, scheduled for July.

Stella Bevington stopped using her modem.

Kevin's second program catalogued editorials urging fairness towards Sleepless. The school board of Denver set aside funds for a program in which gifted children, including the Sleepless, could use their talents and build teamwork through tutoring even younger children. Rive Beau, Louisiana, elected Sleepless Danielle du Cherney to the City Council, although Danielle was twenty-two and technically too young to qualify. The prestigious medical research firm of Halley-Hall gave much publicity to their hiring of Christopher Amren, a Sleepless with a Ph.D. in cellular physics.

Dora Clarq, a Sleepless in Dallas, opened a letter addressed to her and a plastic explosive blew off her arm.

Leisha and Richard stared at the envelope on the hall credenza. The

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paper was thick, cream-colored, but not expensive: the kind of paper made of bulky newsprint dyed the shade of vellum. There was no return address. Richard called Liz Bishop, a Sleepless who was majoring in Criminal Justice in Michigan. He had never spoken with her before—neither had Leisha—but she came on Groupnet immediately and told them how to open it, or she could fly up and do it if they preferred. Richard and Leisha followed her directions for remote detonation in the basement of the townhouse. Nothing blew up. When the letter was open, they took it out and read it:

Dear Ms. Camden,

You been pretty good to me and I'm sorry to do this but I quit. They are making it pretty hot for me at the union not officially but you know how it is. If I was you I wouldn't go to the union for another bodyguard I'd try to find one privately. But be careful. Again I'm sorry but I have to live too.

Bruce

"I don't know whether to laugh or cry," Leisha said. "The two of us getting all this equipment, spending hours on this set-up so an explosive won't detonate . . . "

"It's not as if I at least had a whole lot else to do," Richard said. Since the wave of anti-Sleepless sentiment, all but two of his marine-consultant clients, vulnerable to the marketplace and thus to public opinion, had canceled their accounts.

Groupnet, still up on Leisha's terminal, shrilled in emergency override. Leisha got there first. It was Tony.

"Leisha. I'll need your legal help, if you'll give it. They're trying to fight me on Sanctuary. Please fly down here."

Sanctuary was raw brown gashes in the late-spring earth. It was situated in the Allegheny Mountains of southern New York State, old hills rounded by age and covered with pine and hickory. A superb road led from the closest town, Belmont, to Sanctuary. Low, maintenance-free buildings, whose design was plain but graceful, stood in various stages of completion. Jennifer Sharifi, looking strained, met Leisha and Richard. "Tony wants to talk to you, but first he asked me to show you both around."

"What's wrong?" Leisha asked quietly. She had never met Jennifer before but no Sleepless looked like that—pinched, spent, *weary*—unless the stress level was enormous.

Jennifer didn't try to evade the question. "Later. First look at Sanctuary. Tony respects your opinion enormously, Leisha; he wants you to see everything."

The dormitories each held fifty, with communal rooms for cooking, dining, relaxing, and bathing, and a warren of separate offices and studios and labs for work. "We're calling them 'dorms' anyway, despite the

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etymology," Jennifer said, trying to smile. Leisha glanced at Richard. The smile was a failure.

She was impressed, despite herself, with the completeness of Tony's plans for lives that would be both communal and intensely private. There was a gym, a small hospital—"By the end of next year, we'll have eighteen AMA-certified doctors, you know, and four are thinking of coming here"—a daycare facility, a school, an intensive-crop farm. "Most of our food will come in from the outside, of course. So will most people's jobs, although they'll do as much of them as possible from here, over datanets. We're not cutting ourselves off from the world—only creating a safe place from which to trade with it." Leisha didn't answer.

Apart from the power facilities, self-supported Y-energy, she was most impressed with the human planning. Tony had Sleepless interested from virtually every field they would need both to care for themselves and to deal with the outside world. "Lawyers and accountants come first," Jennifer said. "That's our first line of defense in safeguarding ourselves. Tony recognizes that most modern battles for power are fought in the courtroom and boardroom."

But not all. Last, Jennifer showed them the plans for physical defense. She explained them with a mixture of defiance and pride: Every effort had been made to stop attackers without hurting them. Electronic surveillance completely circled the 150 square miles Jennifer had purchased—some *counties* were smaller than that, Leisha thought, dazed. When breached, a force field a half-mile within the E-gate activated, delivering electric shocks to anyone on foot—"But only on the *outside* of the field. We don't want any of our kids hurt." Unmanned penetration by vehicles or robots was identified by a system that located all moving metal above a certain mass within Sanctuary. Any moving metal that did not carry a special signaling device designed by Donna Pospula, a Sleepless who had patented important electronic components, was suspect.

"Of course, we're not set up for an air attack or an outright army assault," Jennifer said. "But we don't expect that. Only the haters in self-motivated hate." Her voice sagged.

Leisha touched the hard-copy of the security plans with one finger. They troubled her. "If we can't integrate ourselves into the world . . . free trade should imply free movement."

"Yeah. Well," Jennifer said, such an uncharacteristic Sleepless remark—both cynical and inarticulate—that Leisha looked up. "I have something to tell you, Leisha."

"What?"

"Tony isn't here."

"Where is he?"

"In Allegheny County jail. It's true we're having zoning battles about Sanctuary—zoning! In this isolated spot! But this is something else, something that just happened this morning. Tony's been arrested for the kidnapping of Timmy DeMarzo."

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The room wavered. "FBI?"

"Yes."

"How . . . how did they find out?"

"Some agent eventually cracked the case. They didn't tell us how. Tony needs a lawyer, Leisha. Dana Monteiro has already agreed, but Tony wants you."

"Jennifer—I don't even take the bar exams until July!"

"He says he'll wait. Dana will act as his lawyer in the meantime. Will you pass the bar?"

"Of course. But I already have a job lined up with Morehouse, Kennedy, & Anderson in New York—" She stopped. Richard was looking at her hard, Jennifer gazing down at the floor. Leisha said quietly, "What will he plead?"

"Guilty," Jennifer said, "with—what is it called legally? Extenuating circumstances."

Leisha nodded. She had been afraid Tony would want to plead not guilty: more lies, subterfuge, ugly politics. Her mind ran swiftly over extenuating circumstances, precedents, tests to precedents. . . . They could use *Clements v. Voy* . . .

"Dana is at the jail now," Jennifer said. "Will you drive in with me?"

"Yes."

In Belmont, the county seat, they were not allowed to see Tony. Dana Monteiro, as his attorney, could go in and out freely. Leisha, not officially an attorney at all, could go nowhere. This was told them by a man in the D.A.'s office whose face stayed immobile while he spoke to them, and who spat on the ground behind their shoes when they turned to leave, even though this left him with a smear of spittle on his courthouse floor.

Richard and Leisha drove their rental car to the airport for the flight back to Boston. On the way Richard told Leisha he was leaving her. He was moving to Sanctuary, now, even before it was functional, to help with the planning and building.

She stayed most of the time in her townhouse, studying ferociously for the bar exams or checking on the Sleepless children through Groupnet. She had not hired another bodyguard to replace Bruce, which made her reluctant to go outside very much; the reluctance in turn made her angry with herself. Once or twice a day she scanned Kevin's electronic news clippings.

There were signs of hope. The New York *Times* ran an editorial, widely reprinted on the electronic news services:

PROSPERITY AND HATRED: A LOGIC CURVE WE'D RATHER NOT SEE

The United States has never been a country that much values calm, logic, rationality. We have, as a people, tended to label these things "cold." We have, as a people, tended to admire feeling and action:

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We exalt in our stories and our memorials; not the creation of the Constitution but its defense at Iwo Jima; not the intellectual achievements of a Stephen Hawkings but the heroic passion of a Charles Lindbergh; not the inventors of the monorails and computers that unite us but the composers of the angry songs of rebellion that divide us.

A peculiar aspect of this phenomenon is that it grows stronger in times of prosperity. The better off our citizenry, the greater their contempt for the calm reasoning that got them there, and the more passionate their indulgence in emotion. Consider, in the last century, the gaudy excesses of the Roaring Twenties and the anti-establishment contempt of the sixties. Consider, in our own century, the unprecedented prosperity brought about by Y-energy—and then consider that Kenzo Yagai, except to his followers, was seen as a greedy and bloodless logician, while our national adulation goes to neo-nihilist writer Stephen Castelli, to "feelie" actress Brenda Foss, and to daredevil gravity-well diver Jim Morse Luter.

But most of all, as you ponder this phenomenon in your Y-energy houses, consider the current outpouring of irrational feeling directed at the "Sleepless" since the publication of the joint findings of the Biotech Institute and the Chicago Medical School concerning Sleepless tissue regeneration.

Most of the Sleepless are intelligent. Most of them are calm, if you define that much-maligned word to mean directing one's energies into solving problems rather than to emoting about them. (Even Pulitzer Prize winner Carolyn Rizzolo gave us a stunning play of ideas, not of passions run amuck.) All of them show a natural bent toward achievement, a bent given a decided boost by the one-third more time in their days to achieve in. Their achievements lie, for the most part, in logical fields rather than emotional ones: Computers. Law. Finance. Physics. Medical research. They are rational, orderly, calm, intelligent, cheerful, young, and possibly very long-lived.

And, in our United States of unprecedented prosperity, increasingly hated.

Does the hatred that we have seen flower so fully over the last few months really grow, as many claim, from the "unfair advantage" the Sleepless have over the rest of us in securing jobs, promotions, money, success? Is it really envy over the Sleepless' good fortune? Or does it come from something more pernicious, rooted in our tradition of shoot-from-the-hip American action: Hatred of the logical, the calm, the considered? Hatred in fact of the superior mind?

If so, perhaps we should think deeply about the founders of this country: Jefferson, Washington, Paine, Adams—inhabitants of the Age of Reason, all. These men created our orderly and balanced system of laws precisely to protect the property and achievements created by the individual efforts of balanced and rational minds. The Sleepless may be our severest internal test yet of our own sober belief in law and order. No, the Sleepless were *not* "created equal," but our atti-

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tudes toward them should be examined with a care equal to our soberest jurisprudence. We may not like what we learn about our own motives, but our credibility as a people may depend on the rationality and intelligence of the examination.

Both have been in short supply in the public reaction to last month's research findings.

Law is not theater. Before we write laws reflecting gaudy and dramatic feelings, we must be very sure we understand the difference.

Leisha hugged herself, gazing in delight at the screen, smiling. She called the New York *Times:* Who had written the editorial? The receptionist, cordial when she answered the phone, grew brusque. The *Times* was not releasing that information, "prior to internal investigation."

It could not dampen her mood. She whirled around the apartment, after days of sitting at her desk or screen. Delight demanded physical action. She washed dishes, picked up books. There were gaps in the furniture patterns where Richard had taken pieces that belonged to him; a little quieter now, she moved the furniture to close the gaps.

Susan Melling called to tell her about the *Times* editorial; they talked warmly for a few minutes. When Susan hung up, the phone rang again.

"Leisha? Your voice still sounds the same. This is Stewart Sutter."

"Stewart." She had not seen him for years. Their romance had lasted two years and then dissolved, not from any painful issue so much as from the press of both their studies. Standing by the comm terminal, hearing his voice, Leisha suddenly felt again his hands on her breasts in the cramped dormitory bed: All those years before she had found a good use for a bed. The phantom hands became Richard's hands, and a sudden pain pierced her.

"Listen," Stewart said, "I'm calling because there's some information I think you should know. You take your bar exams next week, right? And then you have a tentative job with Morehouse, Kennedy, & Anderson."

"How do you know all that, Stewart?"

"Men's room gossip. Well, not as bad as that. But the New York legal community—that part of it, anyway—is smaller than you think. And you're a pretty visible figure."

"Yes," Leisha said neutrally.

"Nobody has the slightest doubt you'll be called to the bar. But there is some doubt about the job with Morehouse, Kennedy. You've got two senior partners, Alan Morehouse and Seth Brown, who have changed their minds since this . . . flap. 'Adverse publicity for the firm,' 'turning law into a circus,' blah blah blah. You know the drill. But you've also got two powerful champions, Ann Carlyle and Michael Kennedy, the old man himself. He's quite a mind. Anyway, I wanted you to know all this so you can recognize exactly what the situation is and know whom to count on in the in-fighting."

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"Thank you," Leisha said. "Stew . . . why do you care if I get it or not? Why should it matter to you?"

There was a silence on the other end of the phone. Then Stewart said, very low, "We're not all noodleheads out here, Leisha. Justice does still matter to some of us. So does achievement."

Light rose in her, a bubble of buoyant light.

Stewart said, "You have a lot of support here for that stupid zoning fight over Sanctuary, too. You might not realize that, but you do. What the Parks Commission crowd is trying to pull is . . . but they're just being used as fronts. You know that. Anyway, when it gets as far as the courts, you'll have all the help you need."

"Sanctuary isn't my doing. At all."

"No? Well, I meant the plural you."

"Thank you. I mean that. How are you doing?"

"Fine. I'm a daddy now."

"Really! Boy or girl?"

"Girl. A beautiful little bitch, drives me crazy. I'd like you to meet my wife sometime, Leisha."

"I'd like that," Leisha said.

She spent the rest of the night studying for her bar exams. The bubble stayed with her. She recognized exactly what it was: joy.

It was going to be all right. The contract, unwritten, between her and her society—Kenzo Yagai's society, Roger Camden's society—would hold. With dissent and strife and yes, some hatred: She suddenly thought of Tony's beggars in Spain, furious at the strong because they themselves were not. Yes. But it would hold.

She believed that.

She did.

VII

Leisha took her bar exams in July. They did not seem hard to her. Afterward three classmates, two men and a woman, made a fakely casual point of talking to Leisha until she had climbed safely into a taxi whose driver obviously did not recognize her, or stop signs. The three were all Sleepers. A pair of undergraduates, clean-shaven blond men with the long faces and pointless arrogance of rich stupidity, eyed Leisha and sneered. Leisha's female classmate sneered back.

Leisha had a flight to Chicago the next morning. Alice was going to join her there. They had to clean out the big house on the lake, dispose of Roger's personal property, put the house on the market. Leisha had had no time to do it earlier.

She remembered her father in the conservatory, wearing an ancient flat-topped hat he had picked up somewhere, potting orchids and jasmine and passion flowers.

When the doorbell rang she was startled: she almost never had visitors.

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Eagerly, she turned on the outside camera—maybe it was Jonathan or Martha, back in Boston to surprise her, to celebrate—why hadn't she thought before about some sort of celebration?

Richard stood gazing up at the camera. He had been crying.

She tore open the door. Richard made no move to come in. Leisha saw that what the camera had registered as grief was actually something else: tears of rage.

"Tony's dead."

Leisha put out her hand, blindly. Richard did not take it.

"They killed him in prison. Not the authorities—the other prisoners. In the recreation yard. Murderers, rapists, looters, scum of the earth—and they thought they had the right to kill *him* because he was different."

Now Richard did grab her arm, so hard that something, some bone, shifted beneath the flesh and pressed on a nerve. "Not just different—*better*. Because he was better, because we all are, we goddamn just don't stand up and shout it out of some misplaced feeling for *their* feelings . . . God!"

Leisha pulled her arm free and rubbed it, numb, staring at Richard's contorted face.

"They beat him to death with a lead pipe. No one even knows how they got a lead pipe. They beat him on the back of the head and they rolled him over and—"

"Don't!" Leisha said. It came out a whimper.

Richard looked at her. Despite his shouting, his violent grip on her arm, Leisha had the confused impression that this was the first time he had actually seen her. She went on rubbing her arm, staring at him in terror.

He said quietly, "I've come to take you to Sanctuary, Leisha. Dan Walcott and Vernon Bulriss are in the car outside. The three of us will carry you out, if necessary. But you're coming. You see that, don't you? You're not safe here, with your high profile and your spectacular looks—you're a natural target if anyone is. Do we have to force you? Or do you finally see for yourself that we have no choice—the bastards have left us no choice—except Sanctuary?"

Leisha closed her eyes. Tony, at fourteen, at the beach. Tony, his eyes ferocious and alight, the first to reach out his hand for the glass of interleukin-1. Beggars in Spain.

"I'll come."

She had never known such anger. It scared her, coming in bouts throughout the long night, receding but always returning again. Richard held her in his arms, sitting with their backs against the wall of her library, and his holding made no difference at all. In the living room Dan and Vernon talked in low voices.

Sometimes the anger erupted in shouting, and Leisha heard herself and thought *I don't know you*. Sometimes it became crying, sometimes talking about Tony, about all of them. Not the shouting nor the crying nor the talking eased her at all.

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Planning did, a little. In a cold dry voice she didn't recognize, Leisha told Richard about the trip to close the house in Chicago. She had to go; Alice was already there. If Richard and Dan and Vernon put Leisha on the plane, and Alice met her at the other end with union bodyguards, she should be safe enough. Then she would change her return ticket from Boston to Belmont and drive with Richard to Sanctuary.

"People are already arriving," Richard said. "Jennifer Sharifi is organizing it, greasing the Sleeper suppliers with so much money they can't resist. What about this townhouse here, Leisha? Your furniture and terminal and clothes?"

Leisha looked around her familiar office. Law books lined the walls, red and green and brown, although most of the same information was on-line. A coffee cup rested on a print-out on the desk. Beside it was the receipt she had requested from the taxi driver this afternoon, a giddy souvenir of the day she had passed her bar exams; she had thought of having it framed. Above the desk was a holographic portrait of Kenzo Yagai.

"Let it rot," Leisha said.

Richard's arm tightened around her.

"I've never seen you like this," Alice said, subdued. "It's more than just clearing out the house, isn't it?"

"Let's get on with it," Leisha said. She yanked a suit from her father's closet. "Do you want any of this stuff for your husband?"

"It wouldn't fit."

"The hats?"

"No," Alice said. "Leisha—what is it?"

"Let's just *do* it!" She yanked all the clothes from Camden's closet, piled them on the floor, scrawled FOR VOLUNTEER AGENCY on a piece of paper and dropped it on top of the pile. Silently, Alice started adding clothes from the dresser, which already bore a taped paper scrawled ESTATE AUCTION.

The curtains were already down throughout the house; Alice had done that yesterday. She had also rolled up the rugs. Sunset glared redly on the bare wooden floors.

"What about your old room?" Leisha said. "What do you want there?"

"I've already tagged it," Alice said. "A mover will come Thursday."

"Fine. What else?"

"The conservatory. Sanderson has been watering everything, but he didn't really know what needed how much, so some of the plants are—"

"Fire Sanderson," Leisha said curtly. "The exotics can die. Or have them sent to a hospital, if you'd rather. Just watch out for the ones that are poisonous. Come on, let's do the library."

Alice sat slowly on a rolled-up rug in the middle of Camden's bedroom. She had cut her hair; Leisha thought it looked ugly, jagged brown spikes around her broad face. She had also gained more weight. She was starting to look like their mother.

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Alice said, "Do you remember the night I told you I was pregnant? Just before you left for Harvard?"

"Let's do the library!"

"Do you?" Alice said. "For God's sake, can't you just once listen to someone else, Leisha? Do you have to be so much like Daddy every single minute?"

"I'm not like Daddy!"

"The hell you're not. You're exactly what he made you. But that's not the point. Do you remember that night?"

Leisha walked over the rug and out the door. Alice simply sat. After a minute Leisha walked back in. "I remember."

"You were near tears," Alice said implacably. Her voice was quiet. "I don't even remember exactly why. Maybe because I wasn't going to college after all. But I put my arms around you, and for the first time in years—years, Leisha—I felt you really were my sister. Despite all of it—the roaming the halls all night and the show-off arguments with Daddy and the special school and the artificially long legs and golden hair—all that crap. You seemed to need me to hold you. You seemed to need me. You seemed to *need*."

"What are you saying?" Leisha demanded. "That you can only be close to someone if they're in trouble and need you? That you can only be a sister if I was in some kind of pain, open sores running? Is that the bond between you Sleepers? 'Protect me while I'm unconscious, I'm just as crippled as you are'?"

"No," Alice said. "I'm saying that *you* could be a sister only if you were in some kind of pain."

Leisha stared at her. "You're stupid, Alice."

Alice said calmly, "I know that. Compared to you, I am. I know that."

Leisha jerked her head angrily. She felt ashamed of what she had just said, and yet it was true, and they both knew it was true, and anger still lay in her like a dark void, formless and hot. It was the formless part that was the worst. Without shape, there could be no action; without action, the anger went on burning her, choking her.

Alice said, "When I was twelve Susan gave me a dress for our birthday. You were away somewhere, on one of those overnight field trips your fancy progressive school did all the time. The dress was silk, pale blue, with antique lace—very beautiful. I was thrilled, not only because it was beautiful but because Susan had gotten it for me and gotten software for you. The dress was mine. Was, I thought, *me*." In the gathering gloom Leisha could barely make out her broad, plain features. "The first time I wore it a boy said, 'Stole your sister's dress, Alice? Snitched it while she was *sleeping*?' Then he laughed like crazy, the way they always did.

"I threw the dress away. I didn't even explain to Susan, although I think she would have understood. Whatever was yours was yours, and whatever wasn't yours was yours, too. That's the way Daddy set it up. The way he hard-wired it into our genes."

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"You, too?" Leisha said. "You're no different from the other envious beggars?"

Alice stood up from the rug. She did it slowly, leisurely, brushing dust off the back of her wrinkled skirt, smoothing the print fabric. Then she walked over and hit Leisha in the mouth.

"Now do you see me as real?" Alice asked quietly.

Leisha put her hand to her mouth. She felt blood. The phone rang, Camden's unlisted personal line. Alice walked over, picked it up, listened, and held it calmly out to Leisha. "It's for you."

Numb, Leisha took it.

"Leisha? This is Kevin. Listen, something's happened. Stella Bevington called me, on the phone not Groupnet, I think her parents took away her modem. I picked up the phone and she screamed, 'This is Stella! They're hitting me he's drunk—' and then the line went dead. Randy's gone to Sanctuary—hell, they've *all* gone. You're closest to her, she's still in Skokie. You better get there fast. Have you got bodyguards you trust?"

"Yes," Leisha said, although she hadn't. The anger—finally—took form. "I can handle it."

"I don't know how you'll get her out of there," Kevin said. "They'll recognize you, they know she called somebody, they might even have knocked her out . . . "

"I'll handle it," Leisha said.

"Handle what?" Alice said.

Leisha faced her. Even though she knew she shouldn't, she said, "What your people do. To one of ours. A seven-year-old kid who's getting beaten up by her parents because she's Sleepless—because she's *better* than you are—" She ran down the stairs and out to the rental car she had driven from the airport.

Alice ran right down with her. "Not your car, Leisha. They can trace a rental car just like that. My car."

Leisha screamed, "If you think you're—"

Alice yanked open the door of her battered Toyota, a model so old the Y-energy comes weren't even concealed but hung like drooping jowls on either side. She shoved Leisha into the passenger seat, slammed the door, and rammed herself behind the wheel. Her hands were steady. "Where?"

Blackness swooped over Leisha. She put her head down, as far between her knees as the cramped Toyota would allow. Two—no, three—days since she had eaten. Since the night before the bar exams. The faintness receded, swept over her again as soon as she raised her head.

She told Alice the address in Skokie.

"Stay way in the back," Alice said. "And there's a scarf in the glove compartment—put it on. Low, to hide as much of your face as possible."

Alice had stopped the car along Highway 42. Leisha said, "This isn't—"

"It's a union quick-guard place. We have to look like we have some protection, Leisha. We don't need to tell him anything. I'll hurry."

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She was out in three minutes with a huge man in a cheap dark suit. He squeezed into the front seat beside Alice and said nothing at all. Alice did not introduce him.

The house was small, a little shabby, with lights on downstairs, none upstairs. The first stars shone in the north, away from Chicago. Alice said to the guard, "Get out of the car and stand here by the car door—no, more in the light—and don't do anything unless I'm attacked in some way." The man nodded. Alice started up the walk. Leisha scrambled out of the back seat and caught her sister two-thirds of the way to the plastic front door.

"Alice, what the hell are you doing? *I* have to—"

"Keep your voice down," Alice said, glancing at the guard. "Leisha, *think*. You'll be recognized. Here, near Chicago, with a Sleepless daughter—these people have looked at your picture in magazines for years. They've watched long-range holovids of you. They know you. They know you're going to be a lawyer. Me they've never seen. I'm nobody."

"Alice—"

"For Chrissake, get back in the car!" Alice hissed, and pounded on the front door.

Leisha drew off the walk, into the shadow of a willow tree. A man opened the door. His face was completely blank.

Alice said, "Child Protection Agency. We got a call from a little girl, this number. Let me in."

"There's no little girl here."

"This is an emergency, priority one," Alice said. "Child Protection Act 186. Let me in!"

The man, still blank-faced, glanced at the huge figure by the car. "You got a search warrant?"

"I don't need one in a priority-one child emergency. If you don't let me in, you're going to have legal snarls like you never bargained for."

Leisha clamped her lips together. No one would believe that, it was legal gobbledygook. . . . Her lip throbbed where Alice had hit her.

The man stood aside to let Alice enter.

The guard started forward. Leisha hesitated, then let him. He entered with Alice.

Leisha waited, alone, in the dark.

In three minutes they were out, the guard carrying a child. Alice's broad face gleamed pale in the porch light. Leisha sprang forward, opened the car door, and helped the guard ease the child inside. The guard was frowning, a slow puzzled frown shot with wariness.

Alice said, "Here. This is an extra hundred dollars. To get back to the city by yourself."

"Hey . . . " the guard said, but he took the money. He stood looking after them as Alice pulled away.

"He'll go straight to the police," Leisha said despairingly. "He has to, or risk his union membership."

"I know," Alice said. "But by that time we'll be out of the car."

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"*Where?*"

"At the hospital," Alice said.

"Alice, we can't—" Leisha didn't finish. She turned to the back seat. "Stella? Are you conscious?"

"Yes," said the small voice.

Leisha groped until her fingers found the rear-seat illuminator. Stella lay stretched out on the back seat, her face distorted with pain. She cradled her left arm in her right. A single bruise colored her face, above the left eye.

"You're Leisha Camden," the child said, and started to cry.

"Her arm's broken," Alice said.

"Honey, can you . . . " Leisha's throat felt thick, she had trouble getting the words out " . . . can you hold on till we get you to a doctor?"

"Yes," Stella said. "Just don't take me back there!"

"We won't," Leisha said. "Ever." She glanced at Alice and saw Tony's face.

Alice said, "There's a community hospital about ten miles south of here."

"How do you know that?"

"I was there once. Drug overdose," Alice said briefly. She drove hunched over the wheel, with the face of someone thinking furiously. Leisha thought, too, trying to see a way around the legal charge of kidnapping. They probably couldn't say the child came willingly: Stella would undoubtedly cooperate but at her age and in her condition she was probably *non sui juris,* her word would have no legal weight . . .

"Alice, we can't even get her into the hospital without insurance information. Verifiable on-line."

"Listen," Alice said, not to Leisha but over her shoulder, toward the back seat, "here's what we're going to do, Stella. I'm going to tell them you're my daughter and you fell off a big rock you were climbing while we stopped for a snack at a roadside picnic area. We're driving from California to Philadelphia to see your grandmother. Your name is Jordan Watrous and you're five years old. Got that, honey?"

"I'm seven," Stella said. "Almost eight."

"You're a very large five. Your birthday is March 23. Can you do this, Stella?"

"Yes," the little girl said. Her voice was stronger.

Leisha stared at Alice. "Can *you* do this?"

"Of course I can," Alice said. "I'm Roger Camden's daughter."

Alice half-carried, half-supported Stella into the Emergency Room of the small community hospital. Leisha watched from the car: the short stocky woman, the child's thin body with the twisted arm. Then she drove Alice's car to the farthest corner of the parking lot, under the dubious cover of a skimpy maple, and locked it. She tied the scarf more securely around her face.

Alice's license plate number, and her name, would be in every police

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and rental-car databank by now. The medical banks were slower; often they uploaded from local precincts only once a day, resenting the governmental interference in what was still, despite a half-century of battle, a private-sector enterprise. Alice and Stella would probably be all right in the hospital. Probably. But Alice could not rent another car.

Leisha could.

But the data file that would flash to rental agencies on Alice Camden Watrous might or might not include that she was Leisha Camden's twin.

Leisha looked at the rows of cars in the lot. A flashy luxury Chrysler, an Ikeda van, a row of middle-class Toyotas and Mercedes, a vintage '99 Cadillac—she could imagine the owner's face if that were missing—ten or twelve cheap runabouts, a hovercar with the uniformed driver asleep at the wheel. And a battered farm truck.

Leisha walked over to the truck. A man sat at the wheel, smoking. She thought of her father.

"Hello," Leisha said.

The man rolled down his window but didn't answer. He had greasy brown hair.

"See that hovercar over there?" Leisha said. She made her voice sound young, high. The man glanced at it indifferently; from this angle you couldn't see that the driver was asleep. "That's my bodyguard. He thinks I'm in the hospital, the way my father told me to, getting this lip looked at." She could feel her mouth swollen from Alice's blow.

"So?"

Leisha stamped her foot. "So I don't want to be inside. He's a shit and so's Daddy. I want *out*. I'll give you 4,000 bank credits for your truck. Cash."

The man's eyes widened. He tossed away his cigarette, looked again at the hovercar. The driver's shoulders were broad, and the car was within easy screaming distance.

"All nice and legal," Leisha said, and tried to smirk. Her knees felt watery.

"Let me see the cash."

Leisha backed away from the truck, to where he could not reach her. She took the money from her arm clip. She was used to carrying a lot of cash; there had always been Bruce, or someone like Bruce. There had always been safety.

"Get out of the truck on the other side," Leisha said, "and lock the door behind you. Leave the keys on the seat, where I can see them from here. Then I'll put the money on the roof where you can see it."

The man laughed, a sound like gravel pouring. "Regular little Dabney Engh, aren't you? Is that what they teach you society debs at your fancy schools?"

Leisha had no idea who Dabney Engh was. She waited, watching the man try to think of a way to cheat her, and tried to hide her contempt. She thought of Tony.

"All right," he said, and slid out of the truck.

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"Lock the door!"

He grinned, opened the door again, locked it. Leisha put the money on the roof, yanked open the driver's door, clambered in, locked the door, and powered up the window. The man laughed. She put the key into the ignition, started the truck, and drove toward the street. Her hands trembled.

She drove slowly around the block twice. When she came back, the man was gone, and the driver of the hovercar was still asleep. She had wondered if the man would wake him, out of sheer malice, but he had not. She parked the truck and waited.

An hour and a half later Alice and a nurse wheeled Stella out of the Emergency Entrance. Leisha leaped out of the truck and yelled, "Coming, Alice!" waving both her arms. It was too dark to see Alice's expression; Leisha could only hope that Alice showed no dismay at the battered truck, that she had not told the nurse to expect a red car.

Alice said, "This is Julie Bergadon, a friend that I called while you were setting Jordan's arm." The nurse nodded, uninterested. The two women helped Stella into the high truck cab; there was no back seat. Stella had a cast on her arm and looked drugged.

"How?" Alice said as they drove off.

Leisha didn't answer. She was watching a police hovercar land at the other end of the parking lot. Two officers got out and strode purposefully towards Alice's locked car under the skimpy maple.

"My God," Alice said. For the first time, she sounded frightened.

"They won't trace us," Leisha said. "Not to this truck. Count on it."

"Leisha." Alice's voice spiked with fear. "Stella's *asleep.*"

Leisha glanced at the child, slumped against Alice's shoulder. "No, she's not. She's unconscious from painkillers."

"Is that all right? Normal? For . . . her?"

"We can black out. We can even experience substance-induced sleep." Tony and she and Richard and Jeanine in the midnight woods. . . . "Didn't you know that, Alice?"

"No."

"We don't know very much about each other, do we?"

They drove south in silence. Finally Alice said, "Where are we going to take her, Leisha?"

"I don't know. Any one of the Sleepless would be the first place the police would check—"

"You can't risk it. Not the way things are," Alice said. She sounded weary. "But all my friends are in California. I don't think we could drive this rust bucket that far before getting stopped."

"It wouldn't make it anyway."

"What should we do?"

"Let me think."

At an expressway exit stood a pay phone. It wouldn't be data-shielded, as Groupnet was. Would Kevin's open line be tapped? Probably.

There was no doubt the Sanctuary line would be.

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Sanctuary. All of them going there or already there, Kevin had said. Holed up, trying to pull the worn Allegheny Mountains around them like a safe little den. Except for the children like Stella, who could not.

Where? With whom?

Leisha closed her eyes. The Sleepless were out; the police would find Stella within hours. Susan Melling? But she had been Alice's all-too-visible stepmother, and was co-beneficiary of Camden's will; they would question her almost immediately. It couldn't be anyone traceable to Alice. It could only be a Sleeper that Leisha knew, and trusted, and why should anyone at all fit that description? Why should she risk so much on anyone who did? She stood a long time in the dark phone kiosk. Then she walked to the truck. Alice was asleep, her head thrown back against the seat. A tiny line of drool ran down her chin. Her face was white and drained in the bad light from the kiosk. Leisha walked back to the phone.

"Stewart? Stewart Sutter?"

"Yes?"

"This is Leisha Camden. Something has happened." She told the story tersely, in bald sentences. Stewart did not interrupt.

"Leisha—" Stewart said, and stopped.

"I need help, Stewart." *'I'll help you, Alice.' 'I don't need your help.'* A wind whistled over the dark field beside the kiosk and Leisha shivered. She heard in the wind the thin keen of a beggar. In the wind, in her own voice.

"All right," Stewart said, "this is what we'll do. I have a cousin in Ripley, New York, just over the state line from Pennsylvania the route you'll be driving east. It has to be in New York, I'm licensed in New York. Take the little girl there. I'll call my cousin and tell her you're coming. She's an elderly woman, was quite an activist in her youth, her name is Janet Patterson. The town is—"

"What makes you so sure she'll get involved? She could go to jail. And so could you."

"She's been in jail so many times you wouldn't believe it. Political protests going all the way back to Vietnam. But no one's going to jail. I'm now your attorney of record, I'm privileged. I'm going to get Stella declared a ward of the state. That shouldn't be too hard with the hospital records you established in Skokie. Then she can be transferred to a foster home in New York, I know just the place, people who are fair and kind. Then Alice—"

"She's resident in Illinois. You can't—"

"Yes, I can. Since those research findings about the Sleepless life span have come out, legislators have been railroaded by stupid constituents scared or jealous or just plain angry. The result is a body of so-called 'law' riddled with contradictions, absurdities, and loopholes. None of it will stand in the long run—or at least I hope not—but in the meantime it can all be exploited. I can use it to create the most goddamn convoluted case for Stella that anybody ever saw, and in meantime she won't be

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returned home. But that won't work for Alice—she'll need an attorney licensed in Illinois."

"We have one," Leisha said. "Candace Holt."

"No, not a Sleepless. Trust me on this, Leisha. I'll find somebody good. There's a man in—are you crying?"

"No," Leisha said, crying.

"Ah, God," Stewart said. "Bastards. I'm sorry all this happened, Leisha."

"Don't be," Leisha said.

When she had directions to Stewart's cousin, she walked back to the truck. Alice was still asleep, Stella still unconscious. Leisha closed the truck door as quietly as possible. The engine balked and roared, but Alice didn't wake. There was a crowd of people with them in the narrow and darkened cab: Stewart Sutter, Tony Indivino, Susan Melling, Kenzo Yagai, Roger Camden.

To Stewart Sutter she said, You called to inform me about the situation at Morehouse, Kennedy. You are risking your career and your cousin for Stella. And you stand to gain nothing. Like Susan telling me in advance about Bernie Kuhn's brain. Susan, who lost her life to Daddy's dream and regained it by her own strength. A contract without consideration for each side is not a contract: Every first-year student knows that.

To Kenzo Yagai she said, Trade isn't always linear. You missed that. If Stewart gives me something, and I give Stella something, and ten years from now Stella is a different person because of that and gives something to someone else as yet unknown—it's an ecology. An *ecology* of trade, yes, each niche needed, even if they're not contractually bound. Does a horse need a fish? *Yes.*

To Tony she said, Yes, there are beggars in Spain who trade nothing, give nothing, do nothing. But there are *more* than beggars in Spain. Withdraw from the beggars, you withdraw from the whole damn country. And you withdraw from the possibility of the ecology of help. That's what Alice wanted, all those years ago in her bedroom. Pregnant, scared, angry, jealous, she wanted to help *me,* and I wouldn't let her because I didn't need it. But I do now. And she did then. Beggars need to help as well as be helped.

And finally, there was only Daddy left. She could *see* him, bright-eyed, holding thick-leaved exotic flowers in his strong hands. To Camden she said, You were wrong. Alice *is* special. Oh, Daddy—the specialness of Alice! You were *wrong.*

As soon as she thought this, lightness filled her. Not the buoyant bubble of joy, not the hard clarity of examination, but something else: sunshine, soft through the conservatory glass, where two children ran in and out. She suddenly felt light herself, not buoyant but translucent, a medium for the sunshine to pass clear through, on its way to somewhere else.

She drove the sleeping woman and the wounded child through the night, east, toward the state line. ●

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Pernless

The Rowan
Anne McCaffrey
Putnam's, $19.95

It's always a pleasure when a good author who's become stuck in a groove chooses to get out of it. Anne McCaffrey's Pern books have been so popular that the lady has inevitably devoted much of her creative energy over the past years to them. Now we have *The Rowan*, a novel that has nothing whatsoever to do with Pern, which may infuriate all the Pernites out there but which is a pleasure for those of us who remember the various—and varied—books that McCaffrey gave us before she was done to a Pern, as it were.

This new novel is the story of a Prime Talent, The Rowan, a woman with major paranormal and psionic abilities. "Talents" are sought after and honored in the future in which this takes place. Telepathy and telekinesis have finally been scientifically pinned down, as it were, and exploited, which has not only led to a peaceful world, but to the conquest of interstellar space due to the invention of the mind-machine gestalt, a combination of electronic and telekinetic energy which can send ship-sized objects between the stars. Only a few talents are capable of this interlink: they are the "Primes."

The Rowan is discovered to be a potential Prime at an early age. When she is three, a landslide buries the tiny mining settlement ("The Rowan Mining Company," it is) on Altair where her family lives. (McCaffrey uses a small but interesting conceit—the various planets have no individual names but are known by the name of their sun.) Trapped, the child lets loose a stream of telepathic screaming which jars every Talent on the planet and takes days to track down. Even Siglen, Altair's Prime, an aging humorless woman, is seriously affected. After this display, the rescued, orphaned child is recognized as something special—Altair's first native Prime candidate—and is given for training to Siglen. She is called "The Rowan" because it was not possible to ascertain her exact parentage, and thus she was simply known as the Rowan child.

Basically the novel is The Rowan's biography to a certain point in her life, and its drama mostly lies in the detail of the training of a Prime Talent in this basically peaceful interstellar culture. A

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major problem is that Primes react negatively—physically and mentally—to interstellar travel; for a Prime to transport him/herself from his/her native planet to another if they are needed elsewhere (and they are rare enough to always be needed elsewhere) is impossible, and usually traumatic if done by other Talents.

Another problem is simply loneliness, the classic loneliness of the top, which is where The Rowan more or less starts out. Suddenly there is a call from the small colony of Deneb, which has few enough inhabitants, much less a Prime. But there is an alien invasion (almost literally out of the blue), and an untrained but vastly talented male Prime is suddenly heard across the void.

It's an indication as to the general tone of the novel that while the invasion (by hive mentalities with whom communication seems impossible) is handled with a fair amount of action and suspense (concluding with an unprecedented joining of the minds of the various Primes across space), it still, in a way, takes second place to the interplay of relationships between The Rowan and specifically the new, colonial Prime.

The Rowan has been practicing travel across space on her own; when the Denebian Jeff is badly injured, she combines with the lesser talents of Deneb to actually go to him. And she then discovers that he has the ability to travel interstellar space naturally; that what the Primes have believed to be a necessary negative corollary to their talent is really a result of their training.

The alien attack and its repulsion would have been the finale of any other novel; here it is a center piece, and The Rowan's story continues with the rebuilding of Deneb and the establishment of her relationship with Jeff (though there is an action finale in the form of a second wave of alien invaders). *The Rowan* is not for the reader in search of space battles and advanced hardware; like McCaffrey's earlier novels, it's more of a character study of a uniquely talented individual in a neatly thought out future, and as such is very welcome.

First World, Second World

Shifter: The Chronicles of Galen Sword #1

By Garfield and Judith Reeves-Stevens

ROC, $3.95 (paper)

Open with what appears to be a werewolf on the prowl in New York City, and he's making quite an effort to get into a pet shop full of fat, juicy puppies. He does so by exerting some sort of telekinetic force on the lock. His name is Martin.

But he's being trailed—by an unlikely group of people: a young Japanese woman with a punk haircut and thoroughgoing weapons skills who is also a grad student in biology; her mentor, a great scientific mind whose body is para-

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lyzed and who can only communicate by voder and computer; a twelve year old girl who can teleport; and Galen Sword, rich youngish playboy who is financing this entire fantastic operation. It becomes obvious that Sword would do anything for a werewolf; when they finally close in on it, they discover that it is not eating the puppies in the pet shop, it's playing with them. They've got themselves a maverick werewolf, and not even a real one at that. His mind is on the primitive side, but it's finally established that he's a "halfling."

Comes the dreaded flashback which will explain all these initial goings on—*we hope*; current authors aren't all that great at providing coherent exposition for their action openers. In the case of *Shifter*, dual authors Garfield and Judith Reeves-Stevens confuse the issue by doing a sort of double flashback—first a return to when Galen has obviously been in some sort of accident where he *then* flashed back to childhood memories which were apparently long forgotten.? . . . buried? . . . obliterated?

But why he has been so desperate to hunt down a werewolf finally becomes clear. Seems his earliest memories are of a strange family situation involving a society within our society, a world within our world, and this "First World" is one of a variety of people with a variety of powers, shapechangers and adepts and wizards, divided into a multitude of clans, which dovetails into our world ("the Second World") and is yet secret from it. From what he can remember, Galen is of an important family in an important clan, and for some reason, he has been exiled from the First World as a child.

The child halfling, Martin (half werewolf, half human), establishes an emotional bond with Galen's telekinetic young female protegée who, it seems, is also a halfling who has been brought up in the Second World. And so Martin agrees to guide Galen through as much of the First World as he can. There's a wonderful introduction to it when the two visit what is basically a raunchy First World saloon that has an entrance which tends to move about in the Second World. Things get pretty hairy as Galen attempts to explore the complexities of the First World and to find his place in it, and there are obviously people (or things) who do not want him to do so (his lawyer, who knows the score, becomes a victim of spontaneous human combustion when Galen pressures him for the truth). It ends in a big dust-up between Galen's crowd and a variety of First Worlders out for human sacrifice at the American Museum of Natural History, of all places.

Shifter is subtitled "The Chronicles of Galen Sword #1," so the fact that Galen doesn't find out that much about the First World in this episode is explicable. The premise is so promising, however, and the execution so inventive (this

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is a fascinating world intertwined with ours) that one almost wishes the material had been used on one big novel instead of a series of little ones.

Bagpipes and Koto

Two Queens of Lochrin
By Lee Creighton
Ace, $3.50 (paper)

Rian is a researcher who lives in the East Village in New York, and whose life is dominated by two factors. One is her relationship with Kieran, the man with whom she lives; it has been going on for a year and a half and is a strong and loving one. The other is Huashan, an inscrutable Oriental whom she calls "the Master" and who teaches her martial arts, often affirming that he is determined to make her a Master. He seems to want to dominate her life, and after classes takes her off to small sushi bars or coffee houses, sits her down and asks questions such as "What are the characteristics of a warrior?" and informs her that she has a bad attitude.

These two factors are highly incompatible—Kieran dislikes and distrusts Huashan. Huashan ignores Kieran.

Suddenly Rian finds herself subject to peculiar spells of fainting, blacking out or just plain drifting off at unexpected moments. During these sessions she is suddenly in another reality (which she is determined not to believe in) where she is Vennelandua, a princess of a kingdom that one guesses is probably in ancient Celtic Scotland.

She is the daughter of one Corineus, and, from one "visit" to the next, she lives progressive episodes of Vennelandua's life. Apparently the princess is something of a warrior. She is forced to marry Lochrin, the chieftain who has conquered her father. She establishes an uneasy relationship with Lochrin which might be a sort of love, bears him a son, and then must suffer the indignity of Lochrin taking a beautiful mistress from among the captive women and establishing her in an enchanted garden below the castle.

Rian reacts to reliving this on-again, off-again other biography in another time with disbelief, a kind of cynical modern humor, and eventual acceptance. Every once in a while she will bring "back" to her own time concrete objects such as a shift or a bloody sword (much to Kieran's dismay). And during these episodes in the past, she constantly hears the voice of Huashan in her mind (saying things such as "Connect the wisdom of your own being with the power of things as they are . . ." which don't seem to be of much help).

At one point in the book, there is a koto and bagpipe duet. While I've never heard one, I'm afraid my reaction would be the same as my reaction to Lee Creighton's *Two Queens of Lochrin*. It's an interesting idea, but I just can't make the various elements fit comfortably together. I ended up more baffled than edified.

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Montana & Mars

Kent Montana and the Really Ugly Thing From Mars
By Lionel Fenn
Ace, $3.95 (paper)

From the title of Lionel Fenn's *Kent Montana and the Really Ugly Thing From Mars* you might think that it's just possible that this is not a serious book. This assumption is correct, though this does not necessarily mean that it's a funny book. Many books that intend to be nonserious do not make it all the way to funny. *Kent Montana and the Really Ugly Thing From Mars* does pretty well, however; it provides some chuckles and nonstop action, and never bogs down.

What it is really is a '50s movie with its roots in a certain Orson Welles radio broadcast. There's this small town in New Jersey, see, called Gander Pond (adjacent to Gander Mountain). In Part 1, titled "The Players," we meet a raft of Gander Pond's inhabitants, including the titular Kent Montana, who is a semi-well known actor in daytime drama, but also a Scottish baron with an infanticidal mother. Then there's his beautiful downstairs neighbor, Chita, a waitress at the local Chinese restaurant. There's the hooker, Casopia, who does well enough to have the penthouse at the local luxury condo, and the nerdish but handsome scientist she gets mixed up with, who happens to be *named* Hooker (Nicodemus Hooker) whose lifelong dream has been to find alien life. There are lots more, including a nun, a couple of evangelists, an Eastern cowboy on a palomino, and a platoon of military types.

There's also IT, who lands somewhere on Gander Mountain in a violent burst of purple light and tramps around spreading havoc, having crash-landed IT's spaceship which looks less like a flying saucer than like a '59 Caddy. IT is prone to remarks such as "Chester, it's time to clean up this town," which will clue in the savvy reader as to IT's source of knowledge of human affairs, as well as the eventual solution to the problem of getting rid of IT before it wreaks any more destruction (IT has decapitated several people, not to mention demolishing Casopia's condo).

Part 2 is titled "The Plot," which doesn't really thicken all that much. Everybody heads toward the mountain where the purple explosions and lighting effects seem to originate, to find the military already there ("How come they got here so fast?" Chita keeps asking pertinently; she never gets an answer). There's a lot of back and forthing and to and froing ("warn the town!") and one gets some neatly handled clichés (the little girl and the dog confronting the monster, the soldier whose buddy has been killed by the monster and swears revenge et al.)

Part 3 is called "Special Effects" and Part 4 is "Last Reel, and Testament" (as if you hadn't already guessed where the plot came from) and there's a neat little Epilogue *and* credits. All in all, good fun.

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Two Guides

The Arkham House Companion
By Sheldon Jaffery
Starmont House, $34.95 (hardcover), $22.95 (paper)

An Encyclopedia of Fairies
By Katharine Briggs
Pantheon, $11.95 (paper)

I'm lumping together Sheldon Jaffery's *The Arkham House Companion* and Katharine Briggs' *An Encyclopedia of Fairies* for several reasons, none of them all that relevant.

One is that they came to my attention rather late, so this is a tardy review for both. (The Briggs is a reprint, but still deserves attention.)

Another is that they are nonfiction, and that sort of nonfiction which one doesn't review judgmentally beyond a certain point. They are both guides of a sort; one gives a general perusal to see if they are knowledgeably done, and if they are, one makes that fact known and happily points out examples to the reader.

The Jaffery is a book-by-book listing of all those published by the granddaddy of all specifialty publishing houses, Arkham House, which was nominally established by August Derleth in the late 1930s to keep the work of H. P. Lovecraft alive, but which since then, particularly around mid-century, turned out a strange and wonderful list of often beautiful volumes of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Any older fan will tell you that what one most wanted in adolescence was an Arkham House book. This listing, which gives bibliographic particulars for each volume as well as some idea as to the content, brings it all back: the first printing of Van Vogt's *Slan*, the gorgeous oversized volumes of Robert Howard's *Skull-Face and Others* and William Hope Hodgson's *The House On the Borderland* with covers by Hannes Bok, and Ray Bradbury's first book, *Dark Carnival*. It's a feast, and in its own peculiar way, a history of fantasy and horror fiction from mid-century on. And I liked the drawing of the Arkham House itself on the cover.

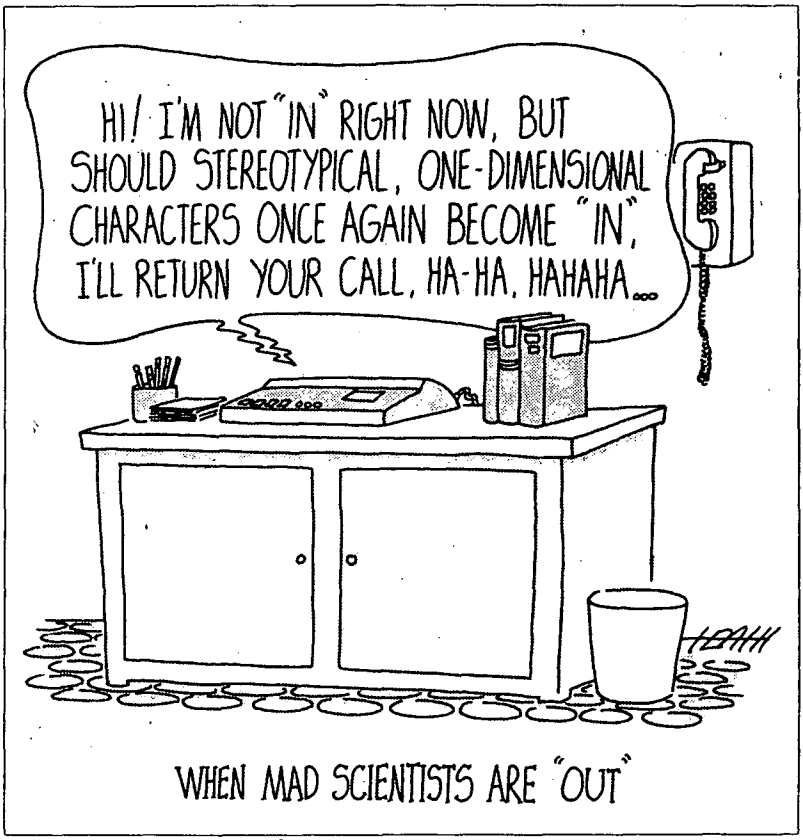
The complete title of Katharine Briggs' book is *An Encyclopedia of Fairies, Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies, and Other Supernatural Creatures*, and that it is, indeed. Unlike some of the superficial and spurious "guides" to supernatural creatures we've seen lately, this one is both scholarly *and* readable. Just browsing through it will give the fantasy reader all sorts of clues as to sources for much in the literature s/he's been reading (Seelie Court, for instance, which I ran into in a book for this column just a couple of months ago; and I've always wanted to know what a "Brollachan" was [answer—Gaelic for a shapeless thing]), and it's obviously a necessity for the would-be writer if s/he wants to use anything in the way of western folklore (most, but not all, is of course Celtic or Gaelic). There must be inspiration for a hundred books in this one volume.

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Shoptalk

Anthologies, etc. . . . And, speaking of Arkham House, their latest is a robust collection of stories by James Tiptree, Jr. (Alice Sheldon) called *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever*; it's a handsome production with illustrations by Andrew Smith (Arkham House, $25.95). . . . And Volume 1 of the five-volume *Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick* has appeared in paperback (Citadel, $12.95).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, 1499 Boul. de Maisonneuve Est, Montreal, Quebec H2L 2B2, Canada. ●


HI! I'M NOT "IN" RIGHT NOW, BUT SHOULD STEREOTYPICAL, ONE-DIMENSIONAL CHARACTERS ONCE AGAIN BECOME "IN", I'LL RETURN YOUR CALL. HA-HA. HAHAHA...
HOHH
WHEN MAD SCIENTISTS ARE "OUT"

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NEXT ISSUE

Thomas Wylde returns next month with a big (nearly novel length), vivid, and suspenseful new novella, one of the most compelling we've seen in some time, our May cover story, "To The Eastern Gates." A vast and mysterious alien artifact is streaking through our solar system, on a collision course with the sun, and the somewhat reluctant crew of the *Arthur C. Clarke—they* thought that they were going to be making the first manned flight to Mars—is dispatched to investigate it. They find a whole living alien world of unsurpassed strangeness and unexpected dangers—but can they find the *answers* to an interlocking set of bizarre and puzzling alien enigmas before that world plunges into the sun, or before its incomprehensible and menacing alien inhabitants decide to kill them . . . or before they kill *each other* in bitter internecine struggles? Tune in here next month to find out—and get ready for a fast-paced and terrifying ride that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

ALSO IN MAY: Nebula and World Fantasy Award-winner **Lucius Shepard** and popular new writer **Robert Frazier** join forces to serve up a bizarre and powerful story about a man with a very unusual relationship to the rest of the world—he *eats* it . . . or as much of it as he can get in his mouth, anyway—in the appropriately named "The All-Consuming"; **Jack McDevitt** returns to these pages after too long an absence with a thoughtful and thought-provoking story called "Tyger"; prolific and popular new British writer **Ian R. MacLeod** takes us along with a driven man trying to Go Home Again against all the odds, in the compelling and bittersweet "Marnie"; new writer **Bridget McKenna** gives us a wry and funny look at some of the *very* surprising things that can pop out of a "Hole-in-the-Wall"; and **J.P. Boyd** returns after a *very* long absence—his last appearance here was in 1981—with a fascinating study of how some very famous historical events might have turned out very differently indeed, under the guiding hands of "The Magician." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for our May issue on sale on your newsstands on April 2, 1991. Or subscribe now, and be sure to miss none of our great upcoming issues!

COMING SOON: New stories by **Nancy Kress, Tony Daniel, Isaac Asimov, Keith Roberts, Allen Steele, Alexander Jablokov, Janet Kagan, R. Garcia y Robertson, Tanith Lee, S.P. Somtow, Mike Resnick, Kim Stanley Robinson, Eileen Gunn, James Patrick Kelly, Lawrence Watt-Evans, Mary Rosenblum, Michael Bishop, Avram Davidson,** and many others.

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The 1993 WorldCon will be in San Francisco. Join all three WorldCons now and avoid rate rises. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at Box 3343, Fairfax VA 22038. The hot line is (703) 2SF-DAYS. If a machine answers (with a list of the weekend's cons), leave a message and I'll call back on my nickel. When writing cons, enclose an SASE (say what it's for). When calling, say why right off. Look for me at cons as Filthy Pierre, with a musical keyboard.

MARCH 1991

8-10—**LunaCon.** For info, write: **Box 338, New York NY 10150.** Or call **(201) 245-5922** (10 AM to 10 PM, not collect). Con will be held in: Stamford CT (if city omitted, same as in address), at the Sheraton. Guests include: D. Brin, Ian & Betty Ballantine, F. K. Freas, Harry (Hal Clement) Stubbs.

15-17—**CoastCon. (601) 762-1309.** Gulf Coliseum, Biloxi MS. Weiss, Caldwell. Year of the Dragon.

15-17—**SerCon. (407) 392-6462.** Boca Raton FL. SERious & CONstructive about written SF/fantasy.

15-17—**ConGenial. (708) 215-0272.** Milwaukee WI. This is a relaxacon: big on low-key socializing.

15-17—**GrandCon. (616) 531-8735.** Harley Hotel, Grand Rapids MI. Media SF/Fantasy.

20-24—**ICFA, Col. of Humanities, Fla. Atlant. U., Boca Raton FL 33431. (717) 532-1495.** Academic.

21-24—**AggieCon, Box J-1, MSC, College Station TX 77844. (409) 845-1515.** Saberhangen, Wolfman.

22-24—**MillenniCon, Box 636, Dayton OH 45405.** C.J. Cherryh, Joe Patrouch, Dr. Bill Breuer.

28-31—**NorwesCon, Box 24207, Seattle WA 98124. (206) 248-2010.** Usually 100+ pros (writers, etc.)

29-31—**Balticon, Box 696, Baltimore MD 21203.** Nancy Kress. At the Marriott Hunt Valley (MD) Inn.

29-31—**British Nat'l Con, 35 Buller Rd., London N17 9BH, UK.** At the Hospitality Inn in Glasgow.

APRIL 1991

12-14—**Technicon, Box 256, Blacksburg VA 24063. (703) 953-1214.** D. Carey, McMahon. At Va. Tech.

19-21—**ICon, Box 550, Stony Brook NY 11790. (516) 632-6460.** Ellison, Poul Anderson, Niven, Pohl.

19-21—**ConDuit, 2566 Blaine Ave., Salt Lake City UT 84108.** (801) 467-9517. Some gamaing emphasis.

26-28—**DemiCon, Box 7572, Des Moines IA 50322. (515) 270-1312.** Joe & G. Haldeman, Synk, Chilson.

26-28—**Fantasy Arts Con, Box 8602, Boise ID 83702. (208) 454-2835.** Some horror/comics emphasis.

AUGUST 1991

29-Sep. 2—**ChiCon V, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690.** WorldCon. Clement, Powers. $110 to 3/31/91.

SEPTEMBER 1992

3-7—**MagiCon, Box 621992, Orlando FL 32862. (407) 859-8421.** The '92 World SF Con. $75 to 3/31/91.

SEPTEMBER 1993

3-6—**ConFrancisco, Box 22097, San Francisco CA 94122. (916) 331-2491.** WorldCon 1993. $50 in 1990.

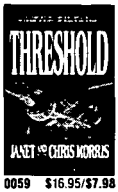
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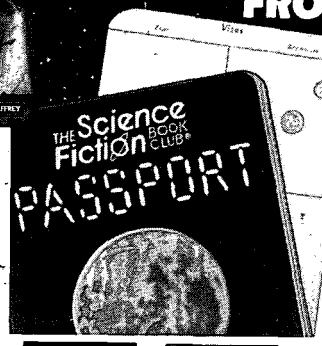
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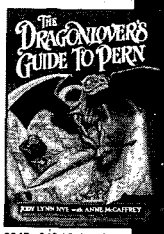
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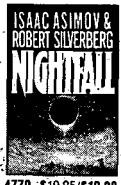




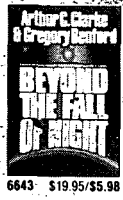
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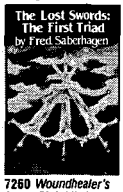
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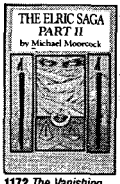
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